



jeevadhara

Vol. XXXVII Rs. 20/-

PROCESSED

FEB 04 2008

GTU LIBRARY

DIALOGUE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

**Edited by
Sebastian Painadath**

ISSN 0970 - 1125

No. 221

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Kuncheria Pathil

SECTION EDITORS

Societal Concerns

Felix Wilfred

Sunny Maniyakupara

Word of God

Assisi Saldanha

George Edayadiyil

The Living Christ

Jacob Parappally

Jose Panthackal

Communion of People

Kuncheria Pathil

Vincent Kundukulam

Harmony of Religions

Sebastian Painadath

P. T. Mathew

Fulness of Life

Mathew Illathuparambil

Mathew Paikada

Secretary

P.U. Abraham

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Mathias Mundadan

Kurian Kunnumpuram

Felix Wilfred

K.M. George

Dominic Veliath

George Karakunnel

jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Initiatives of Inter-religious Dialogue in India

Edited by:
S. Painadath

Malloossery P.O.,
Kottayam - 686 041
Kerala, India
Tel: (91)(481)2392530
Mob: 9249355989

E-mail: ktm_jeeva123@sancharnet.in
Web: www.jeevadhara.org

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	419
Formation Programmes for Inter-religious Harmony	421
<i>A. Pushparajan</i>	
Dialogue Oriented to National Spiritual Integration	427
<i>Acharya Catherine Prabhujyothi</i>	
Formation of the Youth in Dialogical Attitudes	433
<i>Vincent Sekhar</i>	
Dialogue Exploring the Causes of Violence	441
<i>Michael Amaladoss</i>	
Dialogue building Bridges between Christianity and Hinduism	446
<i>Francis X. D'Sa</i>	
Dialogue: Respect Diversity, Recognise Unity	452
<i>S.Painadath</i>	
Dialogue in Action by Creating Bonds	456
<i>Thomas Cheeran</i>	
Dialogue for Creating Harmony in the City Life	462
<i>Ronnie Prabhu</i>	
Building Ties of Friendship with Believers of all Faiths	469
<i>Clarence Srambical</i>	
Dialogue as a Spiritual Pilgrimage	474
<i>Albert Nambiaparambil</i>	
Dialogue for Human Solidarity	482
<i>T.K. John</i>	
Formation for Dialogue at the Grass Root Level	490
<i>M.Jeyaraj</i>	
Making Harmony in the Land of the Buddha	495
<i>Thomas Chillikulam</i>	
Dialogue Promoting Good Neighbourly Relations	500
<i>Mary John Kattikatt</i>	
Dialogue for Creating a New Mind-set	505
<i>James Gurudas Naduvilekut</i>	
The Story of an Axiom	508
<i>Julian Saldanha</i>	
Book Reviews	521
<i>Dominic Veliath, Christopher Joseph</i>	

Editorial

Much is happening on the landscape of inter-religious dialogue in India. Inspired by the vision of Vatican II there has been a significant number of Catholic initiatives of dialogue. However occasionally one hears the lamentation that there is a lull in the service of promoting inter-religious understanding. In this issue of *Jeevadhara* fifteen Centres of dialogue describe their enthusiastic involvement in promoting a culture of harmony. These accounts inspire hope in all who are concerned about this important aspect of Christian presence in the pluralistic milieu of India.

What is striking in the activities of these Centres is that they move with clear perspectives on the future of the nation. India has been for centuries a *home* of diverse religious communities living in close quarters. Followers of different religions live for generations in good neighbourly relations and friendly personal contacts. The cultural ethos of the people at the base is one of genuine harmony and mutual cooperation. This healthy life-base has to be strengthened – this is the primary goal of dialogue-initiatives. Unfortunately power-crazy politicians, profit-oriented merchants and fundamentalist religious preachers create disturbances and provoke violence on the sacred landscape of religions. The effective antidote is to create a counter-culture of inter-religious understanding and inter-faith harmony. The Dialogue Centres are working with this objective.

Most of the Centres organize effective programmes for educating students in understanding and respecting other religions. Research in the theology of dialogue and publications on the sublime values of religions are the significant contributions of some Centres. The causes of religion-based violence and of the upsurge of religious fundamentalism are exposed, and solutions are explored. Regular

dialogue meetings and inter-religious prayer sessions, common celebration of festivals and study of religious scriptures are organized by all Centres. Followers of different religions work together for peace and justice, for human welfare and the protection of the environment. The liberative potential of each religious heritage is thus activated for integral human development. The overall picture that evolves from these accounts is that the Church is committed to a culture of dialogue and collaboration with sisters and brothers of other religions.

The last article is a critical study on how the axiom 'outside the Church, no salvation' has been interpreted over the centuries. It offers a theological horizon for creative initiatives of inter-religious dialogue.

S.Painadath

Formation Programmes for Inter-religious Harmony

A. Pushparajan

Dr. A. Pushparajan, Founder-Head of the only University-department of Inter-religious Relations, has been experimenting with a well integrated and well-planned programme of forming young minds in inter-religious harmony.

A Four-tier Formation Project

As Secretary of the Commission for Dialogue in the Archdiocese of Madurai for nearly 14 years, and as Head of the Department of Interreligious Relations in Madurai Kamaraj University for a decade, I have had many opportunities to experiment upon many innovative programmes for spreading the spirit of dialogue and harmony among the student community which is formative in age and receptive in mind. The most prominent of them are four: (1) One day programmes on inter-religious harmony (2) Cultural programmes for harmony (3) Inter-religious prayer groups (4) Live-together camps. The modus operandi of each of them is given so as to inspire many more people to organize similar programmes.

One-day Programmes on Inter-religious Harmony

A three member team, comprised of a Hindu, a Muslim and a Christian, would pay a visit to a school after duly getting a prior appointment with the head of the institution. The whole programme will concentrate on the 9th class students because they do not have any preoccupation with Government exams, and are much more attentive to our programme. The whole class is given to the team for the whole day. The usual class schedule will not apply to them on that day.

The very first item of the programme will be a heart throbbing inter-religious prayer. It lasts at least for half an hour, well-prepared on the particular theme chosen for the day. The theme may be anything of common concern, for instance, meaning of life, environmental protection or national integration. Readings from all the three scriptures pertinent to the theme of the day and devotional songs form the core of the prayer.

Then, they will be grouped into three batches. The Team Members will address the three batches in rotation, each for an hour. Thus, in three hours' time each of the three members would have briefed all the students on the specific religious resources available in one's own religion to tackle the same common problem. Thus all the students would have learned the response of all the three major religions to a given issue, which is of common concern to humanity. They may have many questions on the perspective of one or the other religion. The lunch time gives them an opportunity to exchange notes among themselves and enables them to articulate their doubts or questions.

The post-lunch session is a common session in which all the three batches are brought together. In this session, anybody may raise any question/doubt about any of the religious views expressed by the team members. Usually students belonging to a religion raise a lot of questions against others' religious practices, rituals and dogmas. They are thus given an opportunity to vent out their bias, prejudices and other pent up feelings against other religions. The team members patiently listen to them all. Once the students' entire steam is blown out, each member of the Team answers to those questions that are directed to each one separately. Care is taken that the answers are given sympathetically, and with right orientation and authentic information. No attempt is made to compare or contrast religions nor to affirm superiority of one's religion over another. The whole exercise is geared to pinpoint that all religions are fundamentally one in their common core, viz. they are all a search for meaning of life, the spiritual attainment of liberation, communion with the Divine and mission of compassion towards the afflicted.

Finally a well-glutted inter-religious prayer is conducted with a view to reiterating emotionally the factors that foster unity of all

Inter-religious Prayer Groups

For any idea to be imbibed with active and practical implications, it must be charged with emotions. For a religious idea to get charged, prayer meetings are important. It is necessary for the youth to be trained to enter into the 'cave of the heart' and to nurture those ideas through prayer.

Nowadays there is greater awareness among the youth regarding issues of justice and human rights. There is also greater involvement of people in struggles for liberation. To energize them with their soul force and to give them an occasion to review the activities of their struggle, and to help them get lasting solutions by converting the heart of the exploiter or oppressor, it may be desirable to make them experience the power of prayer even while fighting against social evils.

In a multi-religious society, any issue of social concern is a common concern, affecting people of all religions living in that area. Therefore an attempt to fight against injustice in a multi-religious society would mean involvement of all peoples to whichever religion they belong. Hence prayer meetings will also have to be inter-religious. That is why Mahatma Gandhi developed his unique method of inter-religious prayer meetings during the Satyagraha struggles.

If schools and colleges take pains to conduct an inter-religious prayer meeting in the event of a social injustice in the locality, it will prove to be an effective means for a change of heart in the people and a good formation of the young minds. Moreover, schools can also organize periodic inter-religious prayer meetings on such occasions as celebration of national festivals, or on special occasions like a natural calamity (cyclone, drought, flood, tsunami etc.). It will be a sort of training of the young minds for the habit of praying together and getting involved in social work with a spiritual motivation.

The habit of inter-religious prayer may be made simple through techniques attractive to them. There are some 'Prayer Clubs' popularized by weekly magazines like *'Kumutham'*. In a page-long column, first a photo of a sick person is given on the top-half of the page and then a brief description about the ailment. At the end, an

appeal is made to the readers for prayers on behalf of the sick person. Such reports can be brought to the notice of the students and the students be asked to join in such prayer clubs. During lunch hour, the usual practice of students is to break up in four or five and sit under the shadow of a tree and take their lunch. This group is invariably an inter-religious group. Just before or after their lunch, they may sit in silence for a few minutes and offer prayers for the sick person reported. They can also send a message of concern and express their assurance of prayerful support through a post card, after duly affixing their signatures on it. It would be a tremendous source of consolation to the sick person, coming from unknown young hearts. More than that, it would be paving the way for the emotional integration of the nation too.

Live-together Camps

The inter-religious concepts received in the dialogue meetings, nurtured by prayer meetings and reinforced by the joint celebrations must sink in the hearts of the young through an experiential strategy. This is provided by a yearly exercise – inter-religious-live-together camps.

A five day camp may be organized with the chosen theme. It may be split into five sub-themes. For instance, if ‘environment protection’ is taken as the major theme of the year, then it can be split into such sub-themes as energy crisis, water management, pollution of air, soil conservation and social justice. Each day will be devoted to dealing with sub-themes by a panel of three resource persons representing the three major religions. In this way, students will come to know what the Bible, Koran or Gita says on a point of common concern. Deeply religious men/women may be brought to the camp and thus provide the youth with a genuine witness to God. Spiritual values of truth, love and justice will be applied and tested by interaction with the existing social situation and be used for removal of the social evils.

In the evenings, cultural programmes can be organized with the same theme. Besides, the whole day’s schedule must be interspersed with prayer experiences, bhajan singings. The very morning

programme is meditation or a yoga session. Thus the whole Camp will serve as an antidote to faith crisis and growing fundamentalism. When students belonging to different religions live together under the same roof for a few days, with a genuine interest in spirituality, and pray together, and discuss together, in spite of their differences and specialties, it will be a powerful joint-witness to the life of genuine faith.

This live-together may be conducted under the sponsorship of the NSS. In that case, such inter-religious camps can also be service camps in the villages. So a major portion of the morning session may be devoted to service in the neighbourhood. Thus students are motivated to exercise their social commitment as well as inter-religious action and harmony. This would certainly pave way to building up a new world order in which spirituality would reign supreme and all religions would live in peace, harmony and cooperation with a view to removing injustice and exploitation and serving the needy humanity.

Today's youth is by and large drenched in scientific and technologicist mindset. If they don't get training in spiritual orientation, they may not bother about it now. But when they get rather old, and when they find a vacuum in life, they will blame the present generation for not motivating them sufficiently into the spiritual realm. Hence it is our duty to form them when they are young. This duty will not be performed by any one religion in isolation. In today's global village it is the duty of all religions to introduce the spiritual orientation to the young generation through inter-religious programmes. The few samples of programmes given above will hopefully be helpful to the readers.

Ananda Reddy Layout
Electronic City Ph II
Bangalore, 560100.

Dialogue Oriented to National Spiritual Integration

Acharya Catherine Prabhujyothi

Swami Saccidananda Bharathi initiated well-designed programmes of inter-religious dialogue and spiritual formation of the youth in view of integral freedom for the people of India.

My Spiritual Journey

God always has his *hidden* agenda and it is true in my case too. My entry into the ministry of inter-religious dialogue was providential. I returned to India, my homeland, in 2002 from the U.S. after 14 years of teaching in the Catholic School System there. It was my desire to engage in youth ministry as a Campus Minister to promote a ‘common pilgrimage’ among the youth in Christian Higher Education Institutions. The most inhuman and notorious communal riot that staged in Gujarat in the same year made me think loudly and respond proactively on how to create a new generation of Indians, who would re-interweave the broken thread of communal harmony.

As partial requirement to earn a graduate degree in Pastoral Studies (MAPS) from Catholic Theological Union (CTU), Chicago, I was working on a thesis on the theme “A search for a relevant strategy for a common pilgrimage among the youth of Christian Higher Education Institutions in the pluralistic context of India with special reference to Kerala State.” It was at that time I came across an article on “Inter-religious Dialogue for a Culture of Peace” authored by Swami Sachidananda Bharathi and published by Xavier Board of Higher Education in India. The article gave me answers to some of my own questions and search for a more meaningful way of life, which will enable me to bear witness to Christian discipleship in a way more appealing to the Indian psyche. After meeting with Swami Sachidananda Bharathi in person and following the dictates of my

own conscience in prayer, reflection and discernment, I finally decided to leave the Carmelite cloister, which was my holy abode for over thirty years, with the permission and blessings of my superiors. In the following paragraphs I would like to highlight some significant initiatives of *Dharma Bharathi Mission*, an inter-religious and socio-spiritual organization, where I now play an active part, for a culture of peace and values.

Dharma Bharathi Mission

Swami Sachidananda Bharathi hails from a Syro-Malabar Catholic family in Kerala and is a former Indian Air Force Pilot turned seeker of Truth and activist of Peace after an encounter with death in an air crash in 1982. In his search for something sublime, he made an in-depth study of all the major religions of India under various gurus. It led him to a personal encounter with Sadguru Jesus Christ, the embodiment of Truth and Peace. He accepted Him as his personal Lord and Master. In the course of time, he left the Indian Air Force and dedicated his 'second life' for a culture of peace in the world as a Disciple of Christ for Peace (DCP). Presently he resides at Dharma Bharathi Ashram, Mulanthuruthy, Kerala.

Swami Sachidananda Bharathi initiated the National Regeneration Movement (NRM) during the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence. He calls it the 'Second Freedom Struggle' for the economic, social, and moral freedom of India as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, who won the political freedom for the country. Swamiji firmly believes that the regeneration of India would be possible only if the *religions* could join hands as one people, 'the people of India.'

Based on the experiences gained from the various experiments done for the regeneration of India, Swami Sachidananda Bharathi came to the conclusion that Peace and Value Education is the only remedy to the problems of corruption, communalism, and the growing consumerism, which is consuming the whole nation. The vision of a great new India – a 'Bharatiya Dharma Rajya' – an India wherein love, unity and peace prevail, could only be realized by creating a new uncorrupted generation of Indians. He strongly feels that a value-oriented education system should be the focus in this nation building process. Thus, he developed a three-tier Comprehensive Action Plan¹

consisting of a *Spiritual Revitalization Programme* (Shanthi Yajna Meditation or Peace Meditation), a *Moral Regeneration Programme* (Chatur Guna or a 4-point programme), and a *National Reconstruction Programme* (Ashtanga Yajna or an 8-point programme) based on the strong foundation of the Indian Constitution and the spiritual traditions of India.

Dharma Bharathi has been conducting enormous number of programmes for teachers, students and parents of various educational institutions in different parts of India for the last two decades. NGOs of similar vision and mission, Govt. Institutions and Business Houses also benefit largely from these programmes. The programmes were well received and appreciated by people of all faiths because of its holistic and integral approach.

Shanti Yajna Meditation

Of all the various modules and programmes Dharma Bharathi has developed, I would like to give a special note and an extra emphasis on *Shanti Yajna Meditation* because of its uniqueness and the impact it has made on the lives of many a number of people, who have learned it and continue to practice it. It's uniqueness lies in the fact it is based on the forgiving love of Jesus Christ. One only needs to be tuned to the Spirit of Christ with a humble and contrite heart to imbibe the spirit of forgiveness, the unique gift of Christ Jesus to the entire humanity.

The cause of utter peacelessness in the world is due to our inability to forgive and mend our broken relationships with oneself, with others, with nature, and finally with the Divine. Shanti Yajna Meditation is developed in such a way that it first and foremost seeks inner healing and freedom from all sorts of negativities, which block us from entering into communion with God. Once, we are able to forgive with the grace of God, we become whole again, enjoy inner peace and thus become instruments of peace in the world. This meditation was the most appreciated part of Dharma Bharathi Programmes. Meditation is found to be the most suitable form of prayer, when people of different faiths gather, where one is free to relate to God through his/her personal Lord.

The Dharma Bharathi School of Thought is a holistic school of thought for a culture of peace integrating the economic, political, religious, and social thoughts of the four great souls of India, whose lives played a significant role in giving direction to the thoughts and life of Swami Sachidananda.Bharathi. An 'economy of permanence' as envisaged by Dr. J.C. Kumarappa, an India of a confederation of autonomous 'village republics' as dreamed by Mahatma Gandhi, 'the harmony of religions' as preached by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and the concept of 'one caste, one religion and one God for the whole humankind' promoted and lived by Sri Narayana Guru, are the four strong pillars of Dharma Bharathi School of Thought.

The Disciples of Christ for Peace (DCP)

DCP is a 'Special Task Force' or 'a new way of consecrated life' for national regeneration and global peace within Dharma Bharathi Mission based on a ²Saccidananda Theology, Sadguru Christology, Dharma Rajya Missiology, and Dharma Bharathi School of Thought. DCP is neither a religious congregation nor an institute affiliated to any particular Christian Church. A ³member of DCP can be anyone, who is rooted in Christ and has accepted Him as his/her personal Lord and Master. It is a call within, to deepen one's *discipleship* to Lord Jesus. It is an 'ecumenical communion of love' of disciples of Christ Jesus, irrespective of their religious background, who are fully committed to the mission of Peace and Value Education based on human solidarity, holistic development and integral peace. Their sadhana is '*Sahana Yoga*' – the yoga of forgiving, enduring and self-sacrificing love as modeled by Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master. They are called to be 'the salt of the earth and light of the world', by being *impartial*, *unselfish*, and *courageous* instruments of God.

A Shift from Dialogue to Dining?

I better understood the meaning of "dining in the Kingdom of God", during my visit to V-set Value Park, Kalpetta, Kerala, with two theology students from Mar Thoma Church, who have been doing practical training at the Ashram in the past summer.⁴ The Hindu community there does not talk about religion or God in their interaction with people, especially of other faiths. Yet, their presence and the

hospitality they provide is an outpouring of nothing, but God's LOVE for us. Everyone, who visits that community leaves with a desire to return because of the vibrations of the 'spirit of love' that permeates in every nook and corner. Is it not the legacy that Jesus left behind for his disciples?

It is high time now, the Indian Church should help its faithful to grow to such a level that each and every Christian will be filled with 'the true Spirit of Christ', which breaks all the lines dividing people in the name of religion and faith. Christ has already impressed India. Only the established Church has to accept this fact. It doesn't matter whether those who are not members of a Church consider Jesus of Nazareth as just a prophet, or the most perfect human being, or the Son of Man, or Son of God. What matters is that we all be united in him and be guided by his ever living Spirit. The Kingdom of God is present where the Spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of Love, vibrates. What a wonderful thing it would be, if all our fellow-pilgrims, who desire to dine with us, were invited to share the Eucharistic Table!

In the culturally and religiously pluralistic India, which accepts and respects *spiritual* persons rather than *religious*, we should look for means and ways that will unite people of different faiths in Christ, who is beyond all religions and cultures. He would certainly be delighted to see the realization of His Word: "But, the hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him" (Jn. 4: 23).

New Horizons of Dialogue Mission

The Dialogue Mission has now come to the crossroad, where it has to proceed to the destination with greater confidence and certitude by taking a wider passage with more drivable lanes. Does 'dialogue mission' mean mere dialoguing with other faiths? Is it just a platform for every faith to present itself for acceptance by and respect from others? Is there a real change in our 'religious attitude' in spite of the innumerable seminars and workshops on Inter-religious harmony? As Disciples of Christ, could we take Jesus of Nazareth as a model, who initiated transformative dialogue mission in his first century pluralistic milieu, creating a meeting point between the boundaries?

In order to embrace the seekers from other traditions and faiths, he didn't mind going beyond the set Jewish boundary, making space for 'the Kingdom of God,' where real communion of hearts takes place. All Christians, who are involved in the dialogue mission, must consider it as a call to discipleship, which demands them to occupy a borderless space of spirituality.

It is prime time for the dialogue mission to open up such a spiritual space for a common pilgrimage, where the *inter-* will give way to the *inner*. The Dialogue Mission now needs to make a move from the *talking realm* to the *realm of silence*, which communicates genuine peace and harmony. Ashrams provide such a conducive environment and stimulus to all spiritual pilgrims, who wish to dive from the surface to the depth. The language of silence permeating the ashram atmosphere could be replicated at the centers of dialogue mission. By nature, ashrams are open to all, irrespective of their religious faith. A Hindu or a Muslim usually feels more at home in an ashram founded by a Christian than in a church, which is exclusively meant for the members of an ecclesial community.

So far, the dialogue mission has been confined within the sector of theologically educated priests and religious. The *less loaded* minds of the youth and laity may be the more fertile soil for the seeds of genuine dialogue to grow and bear fruits. For them, dialogue is part and parcel of their daily life and there isn't much to undo in their less conditioned minds. To sum up what is said so far, the dialogue mission should outgrow the primary level of acquaintance with other faiths done generally at seminars, workshops, and symposiums to a higher level of awareness, which will enable us to set out for a common pilgrimage.

Dharma Bharathi Ashram

Perumpilly P.O;

Ernakulam Dt, Kerala – 682 314

Formation of the Youth in Dialogical Attitudes

Vincent Sekhar

Vincent Sekhar, Lecturer at the Department of Philosophy, Arul Anandar College, Karumathur grew up in a multi-religious milieu, did advanced studies in religions and is now engaged in forming university students in a culture of harmony.

My Milieu shaped me

My home town is Madurai, the great temple city in South India. I must have spent more time in the temple premises than in my parish church. The statues, the images of gods and goddesses, gigantic pillars and roofs, the temple elephant, camel and the bull - they all attracted me, evoked a sense of awe, beauty and a good feeling in me. The morning *Suprabhatam* devotional song and the *kummi* dance, any number of temple car processions with auspicious instrumental music, concerts that followed every festive occasion... all of them meant for me a spiritual and divine milieu. But I grew up as a Catholic in a family of business class, not much bothered about regularity in sacramental life.

Fortunately, my familiarity with the Hindu milieu did not clash with the way I grew up as a Jesuit with world-affirming charism and dialogical structures. The Jesuit Society nurtured in me a spiritual freedom that formed my mind-set. My friends recognized in me a natural talent and inclination for South Indian Classical music (quite new to Christian/Church music until then), especially the Hindu devotionals. It inspired me to compose church hymns similar in its flavour to any Hindu devotional song. It was again quite natural for me to be inclined to Indology, which several Jesuits in formation detested for fear of Sanskrit! I changed track from Physics to Sanskrit. The two years of post-graduate studies in a Brahmin milieu

gave me further grip in Hindu Philosophy, Religion and Sanskrit Literature. I extended my relationship with the families of my classmates, participated in their house functions. In theology, I was trying to reflect on Christian concepts and themes such as the Trinity, the Kingdom of God and the Holy Sacrifice in view of making them intelligent to any orthodox, educated Hindu. Issues related to the theology of religions, inter-religious dialogue, and inculturation were hot topics for discussion in the early 80's along with the growing social and dalit consciousness.

The broad spiritual and religious sense, with which I entered the Society of Jesus and which continued to be nurtured in me, made me more and more pluralistic in thinking and accommodative in behaviour. I tended to be liberal and unorthodox in discussions about traditional topics like devotion, prayer, vocation, religious life, mission, Christian identity in India etc. The shrines, whether Hindu or Christian, became symbols of God's presence. The many devatas became *angels* and protectors of the horizon. There existed a force, that is eternal. Paths were only instrumental and helpful to what is essentially sought in the goal. I subscribed to some of the liberal and radical views expressed in many of the Eastern parables and legends (such as the ones collected by Fr. Anthony De Mello in his books). I picked up meditation methods like yoga, vipassana, zen, and practiced the prayer methods described in the book *Sadhana* of Anthony De Mello.

When I taught and interacted with the Jains and the Buddhists during my research (M.Phil. and Ph.D.), I was pleasantly surprised at the varied ways people think and react. I was astounded when my Jain colleagues asked me at the time of my Final Profession: "when are you going to take the vow of Non-violence and Vegetarianism (along with Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience)?" I was again shocked when the then Tamilnadu Director General of Police, Mr. Sreepal, a Jain, thanked me when I offered him water in his own office. But why should he thank me? He said he had taken a vow that morning that he would abstain from drinking water *until someone offered him*. Something similar happened with another Jain whom I had casually asked to take a seat. Hundreds and hundreds of such (sundry) vows *disciplined* the Jains! It disciplined me too! Man-moulding is

necessary. But it has to be natural. In me I experienced an osmosis of spiritualities, a double, nay, a *multiple belonging*!

Education for Dialogue at the University Level

It is not enough to have an *aptitude* to engage in a ministry. It requires *learning through experience* (insertion, immersion...). *Aikiya Alayam*, the Jesuit Institute of Dialogue, which I had to shoulder for sometime became the springboard for experimenting with new ideas. There were monthly discussions on current topics, bordering on to religion and ethics. Annual seminars broadened our understanding and significance of relations among religious communities. We could plan out actions, enhancing relations in and around our neighbourhood. Neighbourhood gatherings for prayers and celebrations at times of festivities, tragedies like earthquake and tsunami.... initiated a sense of oneness among the neighbours. Programmes like *Youth for Peace* involved institutions for further interest in understanding religions and training in religious/human relationships. These experiences generated interest among scholars and others in the need for the preparation of a relevant bibliography and materials on religions and inter-religious relations. I collected a useful bibliography and circulated it among school and college libraries. I started publishing books on themes related to religions and dialogue: *Quest for Harmony – An Anthology of Religions in Dialogue* (2002), *Religions in Public Life – A Practical Guide to Religious Harmony* (2004), and *Practice of Interreligious Dialogue - A Formation Manual of Education and Training of Clergy and Religious* (2006), all by Claretian Publications, Bangalore.

The Nairobi Declaration of 1984 says, “It is essential *Peace Education* to know and to learn about different religions, ideologies and cultures with whom we share our communities, our nations and our world.” It also says that knowledge is the opposite of conflict and violence, and hence would advocate serious educational efforts even at the early stage of a person’s growth; only in this way can fear be given way to trust.” In Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, I had the opportunity to head the *Department of Religion and Value Education*. With the concurrence of the members of the Board of Studies, I introduced a course on *Religions in Society* for all

undergraduates, focussing on religious conflicts and engaging students in addressing religious differences. *Dialogue* was the innovative method used in this course. The staff had to hold dialogues with students on 50 Questions pertaining to religions, religious experiences, expressions, role of religions in transforming persons, societal structures and the environment.

Students do not so easily talk about religion for various reasons. Many consider religion as too personal, sometimes other-worldly, superstitious, opium leading to division, conflict and violence. They also develop self-righteous attitudes and form negative images and doubts about the other. Negative images and doubts seem to be one of the prime causes for fear, prejudice and suspicion. Hence a basic introduction is given to major religions dealing with the idea of God, world, problem of evil and suffering, human destiny, basic rituals and practices, religious symbols and metaphors, holy books and oft-quoted passages, feasts and festivals, religious communities and their gurus, organizations and ideologies, their assets, prejudices, and issues that lead communities to conflict, etc. At a higher level, there is the sharing of religious experiences, reading, analyzing, comparing religious texts with a focus on what unites them in common than what divides them. Critical questioning and learning are ways of knowing the truth. Students clarify doubts about certain practices of their religious neighbour, such as devotional forms, conversion, *purda* (face-covering), *jihad*, cow slaughter and cow protection. They do discuss deep issues like religious fanaticism, exclusivism and fundamentalism, systems like the caste, which is intimately linked to religion.

In my experience, critical questioning and learning reduces 'stereotyping', a common phenomenon which can be a danger. One needs to be clear about issues before falling prey to rumour, misinformation or false propaganda. We have repeatedly asked students questions on how well they are informed about this person or that issue. Such exercises are small beginnings for getting rid of prejudices! For instance, we ask questions like "do I have friends from other religious communities? how often have I visited their houses? have I invited them to my house? have I ever shared with them the best of what I consider in my religion? have I ever shared

my religious experiences with them or do I learn from them? have I ever visited their holy places, a mosque, a synagogue, a church, a temple, a fire temple, a gurudvara...? what would I say if someone makes a negative statement about other religious communities? and how do I verify?"

This course on *Religions in Society* has 'immersion experience' as part of the programme: students are taken to religious sites for instruction and experience. Exposure is the great educator. It shapes one's perspectives, might even change one's perceptions about people and their environment. After such exposures, some students have expressed awe, displeasure, commitment and so on: "what an affecting experience! It challenged me to take my own faith seriously!" "I now know what devotion means to me." "Does God look so frightening and dangerous!" Exposure on festive occasions: students are invited to gather at a particular family/religious site to celebrate in common their respective feasts and enjoy the festive hospitality. Exposure to yoga and other meditation/spiritual exercises: students learn to manage stress and strain (in academics, relationships, etc.) through some of the physical exercises and postures. Contests and competitions: quiz on religions, devotional singing, drawing/painting an idea on religious themes, and the like. Such an education and training in religion and religious dialogue (building peace and harmony between religious communities) is something new and rare to any undergraduate student, who is generally engaged in academic matters pertaining to subjects like IT, Commerce, Chemistry or History. The effect could be seen in their evaluation sheets, the good it has done and fruits they have harvested.

Jesuits in the Dialogue Ministry

For seven years, I was entrusted with the responsibility of heading the Secretariat for Inter-religious Dialogue in South Asian Jesuit Assistancy (comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, totally 4056 Jesuits in 17 provinces and 2 regions). It meant coordinating the work of Jesuits in dialogue and reconciliation. After initial consultation, I came to realize that the major task of Jesuits involved in dialogue was to promote secular values and ideals, enshrined in the Preamble of Indian Constitution. By adhering to it, one learns to respect the other as the

other and creatively interact with one another for the common welfare. Promoting secular values and ideals requires a theological background and synthesis. The coordinators of different provinces and regions had discussions with acknowledged theologians, like Fr. Michael Amaladoss, S.J., on the theology of missions, religions, uniqueness of Christ and the several issues related to dialogue. And these talks were made available in the form of audio-cassettes. Based on such awareness, different provinces came forward in formulating their Vision Statement with respect to the ministry of dialogue.

Another important output by the Secretariat for Dialogue was the preparation of different syllabi for Educational Institutions (from Primary to Pre-degree and Degree Colleges) and for clergy and religious in their different stages of Formation (from Early stages of Formation through Philosophy and Theology, and all through clergy/religious life). This was done with the help of a few Coordinators for Education and Formation during an all-India workshop on *Promoting a Culture of Dialogue*, based on the directives of the General Congregation 34 to “recognize that the religions are graced with an authentic experience of the self-communication of the Divine Word and of the saving presence of the divine Spirit.” (GC 34, Dialogue 6) The Jesuit colleges in Tamilnadu are blessed with the status of Autonomy and hence could introduce without much difficulty foundation-courses on religions and their role in society as part of value education. What I have been doing in Arul Anandar College is one instance. And the published books on ‘Dialogue in Education’, ‘Dialogue in Formation’, ‘Anthology on Dialogue’ (by Claretian Publications, referred to earlier) were useful manuals.

The Secretariat for Dialogue became a base for me to represent and to share my experiences with others on dialogue in India. The meeting of the Assistancy Secretaries in Rome (June 2001) was concerned with the Papal document *Dominus Iesus* and its implications for dialogue in our plural context. The experiences of religious relations during my visits in the Northern, Western and Southern Jesuit Provinces of India, and countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal were quite varied, new and amazing. Inter-religious dialogue has been taking new forms as Conflict Management, Reconciliation, and Healing of Memories in such caste, ethnic and religious conflict-

ridden areas. The Central Jesuit Provinces concentrate on the plight of the tribals and the dalits, divided on the basis of religion and politics, to bring about unity and self-governance. And the Southern Provinces are strong in dialogue in education, promoting understanding through meaningful interaction on key issues related to religion and the various aspects of social life. In general, the Jesuits in South Asia promote, on the one hand, harmony between two or more religious communities through varied dialogue activities and, on the other, address the negative impacts of fundamentalism, communalism, extremism, exclusivism, and globalization of economy and cultures.

From the time I was a Junior Fellow at Woodstock Theological Center at Washington, D.C., U.S.A. (1998-9, 2003, and 2006) I was sharing with its Director, the Staff and other colleagues about the status of Christian mission of dialogue in different parts of India, its political and theological undercurrents. The International conference on *Nostra Aetate Today: Reflections 40 Years after its call for a New Era of Interreligious Relationships*, organized by the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures, Gregorian University, Rome (September 2005), gave me an opportunity to meet several dialogue partners from the global community, and to taste how vibrant the area of inter-religious relations was. The Berkley Center for Religion, Politics and World Affairs, Georgetown University, invited me (April-May 2006) to give lectures on topics like communal politics and abuse of religion, encountering differences and engaging youth in dialogue, subjects of vital importance and immediately relevant to the several parts of the globe, especially Asia, and particularly India. An interview taken by Prof. William Bole and published in the reputed *Woodstock Report* from Woodstock Theological Center gave the mission of dialogue in India a good publicity. The *Asian Mission Congress: Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia* at Chiangmai, Thailand (October 2006), recognized from our varied experiences of religious relations, the Christian ignorance and prejudice about the peoples of other faiths, urging us to develop positive attitudes of understanding and respect and to take concrete steps to acquaint ourselves with them. Christians need to integrate positive cultural values of Asia into their Christian living, promoting a culture of service, compassion, disciplined life, meditation, silence, simplicity, reconciliation and harmony.

Always Calling, always Challenging

I believe that it is our involvement in the neighbourhood through concrete intercultural and dialogue programmes with other religious and secular groups that would bring visibility to our services. We need to build strong Neighbourhoods of Harmony. We need to promote a perspective that God is the common origin and goal of all religions. Our theologies still have to resolve the problem of *the other*. The problem concerns issues related to theology of religions and its implications for inter-religious dialogue: the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the universality of salvation, the Church's attitude toward other religions as reflected in its documents, the place of other religious scriptures in Christian worship, participation in others' religious rites and vice versa, what could be given up and what could be assimilated and, therefore, the essentials and the non-essentials, the whole area of proclamation vis-à-vis dialogue, its related problems like Christian fundamentalism and Christian exclusivism, the area of minority rights, etc.

Secondly, it is essential to have a personal exposure and critical awareness of the different religious traditions and their rich heritage in order to meet the challenges of the present religio-political scenario of the country. Pastoral formation is still a field for further exploration. Our institutions should promote pilgrimages to various religious sites, guided by devout scholars who could explain to the pilgrims the basic faith and spiritual life related to those sites. It is a good way of experiencing the mystery of God revealed in other religions. Religions need to be liberated from the clutches of the fundamentalists and those who use religious sentiments of the people for their own political and economic gain. We should experience a good networking of people and their movements in order to counter the false propaganda and hate-campaign.

Arrupe Illam,
Arul Anandar College,
Karumathur -- 625514
Madurai Dt. TN.

Dialogue Exploring the Causes of Violence

Michael Amaladoss

Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Loyola College, Chennai, focuses on research into the causes of violence supported by religion and explores ways of conflict resolution.

The Aikiya Alayam

The Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions (IDCR) has its roots in *Aikiya Alayam* or Temple of Unity, founded in Chennai by Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J. in the early seventies. *Aikiya Alayam* was a centre for inculturation and inter-religious dialogue. It was founded as an Indian Christian Ashram, located on Santhome High Road near the sea shore. Its focus was on Indian Christian spirituality. Fr. Hirudayam was an expert in *Saiva Siddhanta* – a Tamil advaitic Shaivite tradition, based on the Tamil bhakti poems *Thevaram* and *Thiruvachagam* of the 6th to 9th century CE. The ashram had as its members priests, sisters and lay people, though permanency was not a factor. Besides personal *sadhana*, research and writing there was a school of South Indian classical music and dance. There were occasional retreats and courses on Indian spirituality, attended mostly by Catholics. It welcomed as residents Indian and foreign scholars interested in Hindu studies and Indian music. Over the years it had gathered a group of friends from other religions, mostly Hindus. This group met once a month for an intellectual exchange. Occasional inter-religious retreats were also conducted. A more scholarly seminar was arranged periodically. Inter-religious prayer services and celebration of festivals were also conducted. For example, in the month of December every year, there used to be a ‘festival of light’ that commemorated together the Ramzan fast of the Muslims, the festivals of light of the Hindus (*Diwali* and *Karthigai Deepam*) and the birth of Jesus feast of the Christians. The ashram was also a pioneer in promoting Indian Christian liturgy in Tamil. It made a Tamil translation of the ‘Indian Order of the Mass’ and used it regularly

for worship in the Ashram. Fr. Hirudayam was a good poet and wrote many hymns that were used widely in the liturgy. Bhajans were also used in their prayer services. There were occasional publications two. *Jnana Vazhvu* (a three volume series on spiritual life in Tamil, the third one being on ashram life) could be said to be the *magnum opus* of Fr. Hirudayam. *Enthaiyar Iraivan* (God of our Fathers) offered a reading from Tamil devotional, poetic literature, Hindu and Christian, for every day of the year. Cassettes of devotional music and a video cassette of *Bharata Natyam* (South Indian Classical Dance) on a biblical theme were also published. When the Society of Jesus in India started Regional Theological Centres in Indian languages in the late seventies, the Tamil one (*Arul Kadal* – the Sea of Grace) was located in *Aikiya Alayam*. This was a source of tension: *Aikiya Alayam* focused on classical culture and spirituality, while *Arul Kadal* related to the contemporary Indian context. Fr. Hirudayam died in 1995. The membership of the ashram was reduced to two of his Jesuit followers. They continued the ashram life with occasional courses on spirituality and the regular monthly meeting of the dialogue group. Somehow the death of Fr. Hirudayam created a void in the ashram. A certain creativity and leadership also died with him. A change was waiting to happen. It would indicate a new direction in inter-religious dialogue itself as well as in inculturation.

The subaltern cultures were rising in Tamil Nadu and in India at large. The Dalits were asserting themselves. They thought, perhaps mistakenly, that the kind of inculturation promoted by *Aikiya Alayam* was only relating to the Brahminical culture of the elite, which was also seen as oppressive. More attention was being paid to popular culture and religiosity. The inter-religious climate in India also was changing. Earlier, though Hindu-Muslim riots took place periodically, the Hindus were more tolerant and a secular climate was dominant in Indian politics. The rapid rise of the Hindutva forces changed this equilibrium, both in society and in the state. The silent majority of the Hindus, who did not support the Hindutva forces politically, was sympathetic to their sentiment. Anti-Muslim and anti-Christian propaganda was on the rise. Some Hindus began attacking Christians too. The rising inter-religious violence in the world, particularly in the Middle East, cast its long shadows on India too. So Jesuits in Tamil Nadu felt the need of rethinking the ministry of inter-religious dialogue.

It is this rethinking that led to the birth of the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions (IDCR) from within the bosom of *Aikiya Alayam*.

The IDCR

The ashram, now without the leadership of a guru, was quietly suppressed. With that the focus on Indian Christian spirituality of an ashramic type was given up. Indian Christian spirituality, of course, can take other forms. The dialogue group that had gathered around Fr. Hirudayam chose to stay away. It still meets in the city every month. The interest now shifted to inter-religious relations as they are actually present in the field rather than in an ideal setting. The new name, IDCR, indicated this change. In its very first year the Institute organized two seminars: 'Religions and Violence' and 'Cultures and Violence'. The second seminar actually turned out to be on 'Castes and Violence'. The participation in these seminars was multi-religious. But the participants were no longer the religious elite. There were intellectuals, social and political activists, leftists, Dalits etc.

The new Institute however continued and sharpened the intellectual and research traditions of *Aikiya Alayam*. The Institute got itself recognized as a research institute of the University of Madras. It can now admit research students, working for a PhD, in the area of inter-cultural and inter-religious studies. At the same time the Institute carries on its own research projects. It ran a project on 'Religions and Violence' in 2004–2007. Taking Coimbatore, where there had been Hindu-Muslim conflicts about 8 years ago, as its field for study, it sent a team of researchers to interview actors, victims and observers. Documentary research, including the internet, was also done. The data was analysed by experts in various fields and led to two seminars: one to find the real causes of conflict (2006) and another to explore means of conflict transformation (2007). The findings and reflections are being edited as a book. It has now started another research project on 'Inter-Caste Violence' that will go for another three years: 2007–2010. It is taking for field research two villages in north and south Tamil Nadu. Dialogue with cultures is strengthened by the presence of *De Nobili Research Centre* in the same building. At the moment, the same team is managing both centres.

Research and Publication

In the meantime the Institute was transferred to the campus of Loyola College, Chennai, in June 2005. Perhaps this marked a rather clear break from the old *Aikiya Alayam* and accentuated its identity as a university research centre. This change also makes it possible for the Institute to reach out to an audience of staff and students of a big city college with about 250 staff and 8000 students. The Institute is also interested in promoting inter-religious education for school and college students. It has been carrying on its publications project. Vincent Sekhar, a former programme director, has published *Quest for Harmony. An Anthology of Religions in Dialogue* (2002); *Religions in Public Life. A Practical Guide to Religious Harmony with Sacred Texts for Common Prayer and Reflection* (2004); *Practice of Inter-religious Dialogue. A Formation Manual of Education and Training for Clergy and Religious* (2006). Michael Amaladoss, the Director, has published *Making Harmony. Living in a Pluralist World* (2003); *Peace on Earth* (2003); *The Dancing Cosmos* (2003); *The Joy of Living* (2004) and *The Asian Jesus* (2005). Two other books: *Living in a Secular Democracy* and *Pilgrims Together* are in the press. Joe Arun, the present Executive Director, has published *Constructing Dalit Identity* (2007). He has edited *Interculturation of Religion*, which has the papers presented at a seminar to commemorate the 400 year of the coming of Roberto de Nobili to India. Another of his books is in the press. He is also editing the volume on Religions and Violence. Viaguladasan, our librarian and documentation officer is well known for his collections of homilies. Besides these he has also published *Inakalavaram* – a book on inter-religious conflict in Tamil. A. Alangaram has brought out *Religions for Social Transformation. Inter-religious Dialogue from a Subaltern Perspective*. (2006) Our research-publication orientation and output is therefore strong: thirteen books in five years. This list does not include the many articles in English and Tamil. This orientation will become stronger and wider as our research students start publishing the fruits of their own research. Facilitating them will be our task.

Plans to network with *Henry Martyn Institute*, devoted to programmes of Conflict Transformation in Hyderabad and the *Institute of Islamic Studies* in Mumbai are progressing. We plan to

reach out to schools in the area with short training programmes in Conflict Transformation, in collaboration with the *Henry Martyn Institute*. In September 2007 we plan to bring together the leaders of different religions, partly in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Minorities Commission and other similar bodies in Chennai. This may become an annual feature. The Institute has a good library which is at the disposal of researchers. Occasionally we also receive groups of students from foreign universities who profit by our lectures and guidance. The Staff also lectures on dialogue themes outside the Institute both in India and abroad.

The New Orientation of Dialogue

The evolution of *Aikiya Alayam* into IDCR represents a new orientation in inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue got started in the Church as an instrument of mission – the second best way to attract people to the Church. Now we are realizing that dialogue is worthwhile and important in itself. Any sort of ulterior motive or hidden agenda will drive people away from us. If we believe that the Spirit of God is present and active also in other religions and if we respect the freedom of God and of the others, then equality and mutuality are indicated, though honesty in dialogue demands that we are firm and rooted in our faith convictions.

Secondly, we are living in world of inter-religious conflicts. In a world of globalized communications violence in a particular place affects the attitudes of people everywhere. In such a situation, conflict transformation and peace making seem to be the first necessary steps in dialogue. It is easy to find a small group of people from different religions who stand for peace. But they will not have any wider impact. Peace making today is not possible without research into causes and concrete efforts at conflict transformation. At IDCR we have not yet started any concrete programmes for conflict transformation. We may have to start with training people and animating them. It is something that we still have to do.

Religions are for people and their lives and not vice versa. In a multi-religious society like India we have to collaborate with all people of good will to work for a secular socio-political order. A multi-religious education that dispels ignorance and prejudice about other

religions, especially from young minds, is a must. It is in this context that comparative theology and sharing of spiritual experience leading to mutual enrichment would become symbolic and meaningful.

It seems that the situation of inter-religious conflict has made every one today interested in inter-religious dialogue, however it is phrased. This may then be a moment of *kairos* that will lead us, however slowly, to a world community of justice, peace and love.

IDCR, Loyola,
Chennai 600034, TN

Dialogue Building Bridges between Christianity and Hinduism

Francis X. D'Sa

The Institute for the Study of Religion, De Nobili College, Pune 14, focuses on research on the foundational themes and scriptures related to dialogue and reaches out to the poor in inter-religious collaboration.

The Research Institute

We Christians in India have been living on the whole in friendly contact with believers of other religions. The contact however has been such that we have been relating to *others* on a superficial level without a real knowledge of their religions, their message and above all the God-experience they mediate. And in spite of friendly relations our religious traditions have not been really enriched in any significant way. The relationship has been more like oil in water.

Admittedly it is not at all an easy task for religious traditions to relate to other traditions on a deeper level. Usually the approach to the other is from the *outside* as it were. We may *know about* each other and each other's religion but we do not *know* each other's religious convictions! Knowing each other is a mutual affair. If we

want the others to understand us as we understand ourselves, we have to understand them as they understand themselves!

This was the insight which has given direction to the work of the Institute for the Study of Religion (De Nobili College, Pune). With a doctoral thesis on Revelation as understood and interpreted by the universally maligned Purva Mimamsa (the exegetical and hermeneutical discipline of ancient India), my interest moved towards the field of hermeneutics. The Purva Mimamsa has a revolutionary perspective; it holds on to an eternal revelation (apaurusheyatva) but polemizes against the existence of God. Its unusual understanding of language and its relation to reality opened my eyes to the role of language in religion. It has led me to suspect and question the hidden pre-sub-positions of my beliefs!

The focus of our Institute therefore has been on research, and research has led to dialogue, and dialogue has opened the doors to the question of justice (the weak point of most religions). Our work boils down to three areas.

Publications

The Centre has published word-indices of important texts to promote creative and critical studies of the Hindu Scriptures (the Bhagavadgita, Shankara's Gitabhashya and the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad) as well as studies like Shabdapramanyam in Shabara and Kumarila, and numerous contributions to hermeneutical and cross-cultural studies.

All this can be summed up thus: (a) Research publications working out the "functional equivalents" between the Christian and the Hindu traditions, (b) Publication of Sanskrit Word-Indices of important religious texts, (c) Courses on Hindu beliefs and spirituality and their possible challenge to Christianity, (d) Interdisciplinary and inter-religious (and sometimes international) conferences (with Adivasis, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and Secularists), and (e) Lectures on dialogue and inter-culturation.

Contact with a certain section of the RSS in Pune has brought us positive resonance where our interpretative writings are concerned. In view of this we realize that we need to deepen and broaden this aspect so that an ongoing dialogue emerges.

With Dr. Clemens Mendonca as our Executive Director (she is also the secretary of the FABC's Office of Ecumenism and Dialogue) the Institute has broadened its scope to include inter-religious education and dialogue, and women's studies. Her dissertation: "Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue. Interreligious Education in India. The Relevance of Raimon Panikkar's Intercultural Challenge" (Univ. of Tübingen) won the prize for the best thesis of the year in the Faculty of Theology.

Another member of the Institute, Cynthia Pinto, is finalizing her Ph.D in Tübingen on battered women who are housed and rehabilitated in an inter-religious project (Maher, mother's home in Marathi) on the outskirts of Pune in which our Institute is involved. Her theme is the salvific significance of the suffering of these women in the light of Mt 25: 31-46.

Conferences

All this has resulted in dialogue-conferences with experts from the different traditions on topics of mutual interest. The Institute has also organized a number of international conferences in collaboration with the German universities of Frankfurt, Tübingen and Duisburg. This has inevitably brought about the realization that our beliefs are not meaningful to other traditions and that we all have to learn to express our religious convictions in a way that is, as far as possible, inter-religiously intelligible.

Another realization is that our dialogue process overstresses orthodoxy to the neglect of orthopraxis. This is one of the insights that gave birth to Maher. Working together creates trust and confidence and opens people up to others. This has been the positive and fruitful experience of our Project Maher.

Social Involvement

Maher is an important aspect of the social involvement of the Institute. It brings scholars in touch with problems of women (in rural India) and illustrates how the dialogue of life accompanied by the dialogue of action can bring about peace, justice and harmony. The different groups working in Maher (the trustees, the social workers, the Mothers of the children's homes and the office and administrative staff) hold their regular meetings and sharings in the Institute. Thus the Institute brings together scholars and thinkers (who, it is said, do

not work) and workers (who do not to think) together. Thinkers are affected by the enthusiasm of those working in Maher and the Maher-teams become acquainted with the complexities of the question of justice. Maher is not just a social project; it is a concretized inter-religious vision.

Theological Perspectives

If we were to name the two most important words in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* [= EA] without much hesitation one would most probably opt for proclamation and dialogue. The two are intimately connected. However this intimate connection is a recent Post-Vatican II insight. Earlier the concentration was almost exclusively on proclamation because our contact with and knowledge of other faith-traditions was minimal.

With deepening awareness of how God's Spirit is at work in the world (EA 15) the Church has discovered that such one-sided emphasis does justice neither to the universal claim of revelation nor to the complex task of proclamation. The papal documents of the last decades have been insisting repeatedly that with and in creation God has begun a dialogue with humankind and that in order to understand this dialogue more comprehensively it is important to listen to what the Divine Mystery is saying and working in the history of the diverse traditions.

For some Christians whose Christology has been imported from a monocultural matrix this is a hard saying. But Raimon Panikkar has given us the lead by speaking of the Mystery that is at work everywhere and all times and which we Christians call the Christ but for which other traditions have their own names. This Mystery has revealed itself differently in different religions. This is not relativism but relativity, he says, because the validity of our beliefs is related to and limited by our world of beliefs which cannot be universalized. As Raimon Panikkar has expressed it in his "Sermon on the Mount of Intrareligious Dialogue": "Blessed are you when you do not give up your convictions, and yet you do not set them up as absolute norms."

The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue has very relevantly spoken of four levels on which dialogue has to take place: the dialogue of life, of action, of theological exchange and of spiritual

experience. When the dialogue of life is intense, the dialogue of action follows. Our common concerns will spontaneously flower into common action. Once the dialogue of action becomes an integral part of our life then the dialogue of theological exchange and spiritual sharing will follow without much ado. "Working for the Kingdom means *acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it*. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness." (Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 15)

The Significance of Research

It is in this line of thinking that the work of the Institute for the Study of Religion is to be seen. The Institute aims at highlighting the liberative spirit at work in the Hindu Traditions. However there are many who are sceptical of the role of research. Why then, they ask, do we not engage in direct dialogue? Why go through the detour of books and research? The answer is simple: Without preparation it is not possible for a believer of one faith-tradition to understand to resonate with the beliefs of another faith-tradition. All of us tend to look and understand others through our own eyes, through our own perspective - neglecting the perspective of the other. Moreover, one may be a believer but that does not necessarily equip one to express and expose one's beliefs in a manner that resonates with believers of other traditions. *The work of bridge-building presupposes knowledge of both the shores*. It is here that the work of research, dialogue and social commitment finds its justification and its rightful place.

The ways of research are very different from those of fast food and instant coffee. Research requires years of patient plodding and search to see the differences in apparent similarities and to uncover similarities in apparent differences. The area of religion is very tricky because it is especially here that appearances can be deceptive. Each religion lives, moves and has its being in a specific universe of faith; only within this universe can the specific behaviour and beliefs of a faith-tradition make sense. Those outside this universe do not and cannot find them meaningful. The Institute for the Study of Religion

attempts to build bridges between the *insiders* and *outsiders* by making them aware both of the difficulties of facile judgments, emotional factors and prejudices that block understanding, and also of possible elements that could promote a deeper and more meaningful approach to other traditions.

Religions have to learn to communicate in a way that is meaningful and relevant to both sides. Today proclamation does not make sense to believers of another tradition. That is where we rely on dialogue. But dialogue is not possible without knowledge of the *other*. This however is not a strategy but a necessity if religions are to communicate with and enrich one another. "Inter-religious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences." (EA 31).

Both Vatican II and *Ecclesia in Asia* (15, 31) speak unambiguously of the salvific role of other religions. Pope John Paul II says (EA 31): "As the Church explores new ways of encountering other religions, I mention some forms of dialogue already taking place with good results, including scholarly exchanges between experts in the various religious traditions or representatives of those traditions, common action for integral human development and the defence of human and religious values."

The Institute for the Study of Religion sees its task in bridge-building and more especially in articulating to some extent the salvific role of the Christian and the Hindu traditions so that they communicate with one another in a meaningful manner. Though not the most important, the dialogue of theological exchange is a necessary step in the unavoidable process of proclamation and dialogue. Furthermore, "The Church must continue to strive to preserve and foster at all levels this spirit of encounter and cooperation between religions... For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment." (EA 31)

The Institute for the Study of Religion has from its very beginning believed in this approach. That is the reason why it has been involved in a number of social projects, especially for women, tribals and children. Dialogue of life and dialogue of action are foundational for

all other kinds of dialogue because they give birth to mutual trust. One can get acquainted with the spirit of a culture and its religion only when one lives with people who believe and act accordingly. Credibility is born in and through commitment. Faith and justice cannot be separated. The one has to do with being and the other with doing. Action without faith is activism and faith without action is ideology. Finally, research is meaningful only when it is part of a larger vision, otherwise it becomes part of a library.

Institute for the Study of Religion
De Nobili College
Pune 411014

Dialogue: Respect Diversity, Recognise Unity

S.Painadath

Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality at Kalady, offers an ashram-like atmosphere for seekers from different religions to feel at home in their spiritual journey.

Sameeksha, a Place of Integral Vision

Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality, is an initiative of the Jesuits of the Kerala Province to promote inter-religious dialogue at the level of spirituality. In an ashram setting on the banks of the Poorna river Sameeksha offers a *home* for seekers of all religions. It was founded in 1987 at Kalady, the birthplace of Sankaracharya. The set up and life-style of Sameeksha embody the sublime values of the Indian ashram heritage: simplicity of life, contemplative atmosphere, closeness to people, hospitality, sylvan ambience, small living cottages, vegetarian food etc. Sameeksha is more of a presence

than a project: not too many activities are taking place here, but people feel at home here beyond the walls of religions and cultures, caste distinctions and denominational separations. Integral vision – as the term *sam-eksha* means – is the motto of this Centre: *mitrasya chakshusha sameekshamahe* (let us look at one another with the eye of a friend, Yaj. Veda. 36,18)

At the centre of Sameeksha there is an inter-religious meditation hall named *samanvaya*. Built according to the specifications of a traditional temple it has four doors in the four directions welcoming seekers from all religions and cultures, from all faiths and persuasions. The meeting point is the oil lamp burning at the centre of the hall: the symbol of the divine presence in which all become *one*. Around it four holy scriptures are kept exposed: Bhagavad Gita, Dhammapada, Bible and Koran. Scriptures are like pointers to the divine Centre of Light. In this hall meditation courses and prayer meetings open to followers of all religions are conducted. Samanvaya Meditation Hall is taken as a symbol of inter-religious harmony. Muslims, when they come, make their prayers here, Hindus sit singing their bhajans and Christians have their Eucharist here. When Nitya Chaitanya Yati visited Samanvaya, he spontaneously said: this is the future of humanity!

Sameeksha offers a set of programmes every year: retreats based on Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, John's Gospel, Christian mystics and Indian sages, initiation to namajapa, seminars on theology of religions, courses in Indian spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, secular spirituality, social ethics, art as medium of spiritual experience etc. A group of Jesuit theology students stay in this ashram setting and get their basic theological formation lasting for three years. It is part of the nationwide efforts to develop a contextualised and integrated theological formation through the Regional Theology Centres. The medium of instruction is Malayalam, the vernacular of the region.

Respect Diversity, Recognise Unity

The main objective of Sameeksha is the promotion of inter-religious harmony. All seminars and courses offered here, either in theology or in spirituality, have the concern of dialogue as the basic thrust. The students and participants are constantly alerted on the inspirations

which are being drawn from the sages, scriptures and symbols of other religions. Hence scriptures of world religions are constantly referred to. Respect the diversity of religions and recognise the unity in spirituality – this is the basic theological paradigm with which dialogue sessions are conducted and the course are offered. Formation of the mind-set for a culture of harmony, openness to the sublime values and experiences of other religions, appreciation for the rich spiritual heritage of India, initiation to the mystical traditions of the Church, development of an Indian Christian spirituality and sensitivity to the social issues of the country are some of the objectives with which programmes are offered.

Research and publication is an important concern of the staff of Sameeksha. The library with a good collection of books on Indian and Christian spirituality, on world religions and on inter-religious dialogue is an attraction for students to do serious study on spirituality and dialogue. The staff and students of the local Sankaracharya University make use of the library. *Prarthananjali*, a book with hundred prayers from diverse world religions with pertinent reflections, was published in 2006 to promote inter-religious prayer meetings. *We are Co-pilgrims* published in 2005 contains an Indian paradigm of a theology of inter-religious harmony. *The Spiritual Journey* (2005) offers an Indian interpretation of the Christian experience of the divinisation of the human (*theosis*); it is a theological attempt to bring Christian mysticism in dialogue with Hindu Vedanta. *Yesu Vyaktiyum Saktiyum* (in Malayalam) is a contribution to Christology in the context of religious pluralism in India. *We dare the Waters* is a research study on the impact of primal religiosity on the people of the fishery coast. A research project explores the underpinnings of the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism in Kerala

The staff conducts seminars on inter-religious dialogue in different parts of India and the Far East as well as in Europe. Beyond the traditional boundaries of religions and cultures people are seeking genuine spiritual experiences. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional ritual forms and an increasing fascination for mystical pursuits. The Spirit of God is bringing seekers of all cultures and religions together into a unity in humanising spirituality, into a process

of inter-religious harmony. In spite of the violent eruptions of religious fundamentalism the world is moving towards a culture of inter-religious solidarity for peace and justice. The East has something specific to contribute to the West in this new phase of the spiritual evolution of humanity. Sameeksha explores these specific elements of Indian spirituality in encounter with the Christian heritage.

Value Formation of the Youth

Formation of students in ethical values has been an important thrust of the services of Sameeksha. A series of booklets containing the perspectives of world religions on issues like family ethics, education, prayer, social commitment, protection of the environment and openness to other religions, was published to educate teachers in inter-religious understanding. Of late, three books have been published as Teachers Manual for conducting value education programmes at the high school and plus-two levels. These books have been prepared by the students of the Regional Theology Centre at Sameeksha on the background of their rich experiences in conducting youth programmes over the years. Seminars are being given to teachers on how to use this material in the schools. A specific feature of this methodology is that a genuine respect for the religious otherness of the other is instilled in the minds and hearts of the students. Relevant quotations from different scriptures and appropriate prayers from world religions are given to offer a spiritual base for value education.

Sameeksha has two childrens' clubs (*kuttikootam*) which offer a platform for children to move freely on the ashram campus. Study centres are organised where children from poorer families could come together for daily evening study. Onam and Christmas are celebrated with an enthusiastic involvement of children and parents beyond religious divisions. Children imbibe values of inter-religious harmony through these programmes. A children's library functions at Sameeksha.

It has been our experience at Sameeksha that dialogue primarily consists not in talking, but in cultivating genuine inter-religious relationships. Relationship grows through deep friendship, genuine hospitality, common commitment to human issues and much deeper in meditative silence. When followers of different religions sit together

and sink into the *divine* silence that binds our hearts at a deeper level, relationships are deepened. In silence we listen to the divine Spirit. There is a sacred tree in front of the Harmony meditation hall. It constantly remind us: *what grows makes no noise!*

Sameeksha Ashram
Kalady 683574
Ernakulam Dt., Kerala

Dialogue in Action by Creating Bonds

Thomas Cheeran

Divyodaya, Inter-religious Centre, organises dialogue programmes at diverse levels reaching out to different groups in the cosmopolitan city of Coimbatore.

Divyodaya

The teaching of the II Vatican council "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual values found in other religions and cultures" (NA 2.6) and the personal experience of organizing seminars for members of various faith traditions as well as theology courses for the laity were an inspiration and an eye opener for Fr. John Peter, CMI, the founder-director of Divyodaya.. This inspiration took shape into a mission among the people *outside* the Church and to start an open house where people of different religions or ideologies could come together to share their experiences and views on issues of common interest. This was the origin of Divyodaya, an inter religious dialogue centre at the cosmopolitan city of Coimbatore in 1980. "Divyodaya" means "Divine awakening" i.e., the ability to view the whole of humanity as one family, a family beyond the barriers of caste, creed or community. It is sponsored by the Coimbatore Province of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate Congregation (CMI).

Most of the people of Coimbatore are migrants from different parts of India and are of varied faith traditions. The reason for their migration is the employment opportunities in the industry centered Coimbatore. The inter religious character of the Centre was in response to a search for softening the fear and tensions of communal disturbances that prevailed among the people of Coimbatore in the early eighties.

Overcoming Prejudices

In the beginning, the members of other religions looked at our initiative with a suspicious eye, fearing it to be a new way to convert them to Christianity. Christians themselves too had their own reservation even to enter the premises of Divyodaya lest they should loose their Christian faith by mixing up with people of other religions and cultures. Once the real objective of this endeavour became clearer to the people, gradually, through their participation and inter-action, Divyodaya came to be recognized and appreciated by one and all. All the activities of Divyodaya are directed towards realizing the motto, “the bonds that unite us are stronger than the barriers that separate us”, which is a lived experience of the people associated with Divyodaya. Once, during an interaction with a group of staff and students of a college, a question was put before us as to whether Divyodaya was not meant to convert people to Christianity. The apprehension of the group was removed by the reply of a Muslim member, a professor of psychology, that there was only one type of conversion taking place in Divyodaya citing the famous words of Mother Theresa: “to make a Hindu a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian.” Today Divyodaya became a landmark for promoting religious harmony, peace, mutual understanding, and an inspiration for similar initiatives and activities by other social and religious organizations.

Inter religious pilgrimage

Since Divyodaya is focusing on youth, frequent developmental programmes are organized. Inter religious pilgrimage is an essential part of the training. The participants visit all the important worshipping places in the city such as Church, Temple, Mosque and Gurudwara. Proximity to all these worshipping places is an advantage for such visits. Each visit to a worshipping place is an occasion for the

participants to listen to and interact with the religious leaders on that particular religion. The visit is an occasion for the participants “to acknowledge the spiritual and moral truths” found in other religions.

Divyodaya organizes a yearly programme, inter-religious living together called *sangamam*. It is meant to rediscover the threads of harmony among the members of different religious traditions through meditation, personal exchange of experiences, enlightening discourses, group discussions, inter-religious pilgrimage, prayers and meals. It provides a rare opportunity to experience the truth that religions do not divide the human family but strengthen its unity and enrich its treasures of sublime values. The themes selected for such conferences are related to religions in dialogue, harmony of religions, religious conflict resolutions, religions and development, religions for integration etc.

Social involvement

“Obviously, for a person like me working with the office of the Pope in the Vatican city for the promotion of good relations between believers in the different religions, this institute is a sign of hope,” said Cardinal Arinze, the then president of the Department of inter-religious dialogue, in his address delivered at Divyodaya in 1990 (Divyodaya News Letter, 1990, p. 2). The sign of hope becomes a reality when people contribute to the good of the human persons. He further added that religion must not be restricted to prayers and worship in our little communities. It must be relevant to life in the society, to help the poor, the sick, the oppressed and the forgotten (ibid., p.3). Divyodaya’s participation in reducing the sufferings of people either by collecting funds from the city of Coimbatore for the victims of natural calamities, joining with the District authorities to provide shelters and earn a living for the displaced people of the city due to clearance of the huts from the heart of the city or conducting prayers of the victims of man-made calamities in different parts of India were indeed vibrant expressions of the dynamism of the people. In all these activities the cooperation and presence of the members from different religions are ensured.

Research projects

Attracted by the vision of Divyodaya and its contribution to the society, two research works have been undertaken: one at MA level and the other at M. Phil. level. The titles of the dissertations are: “Divyodaya Inter religious centre, Coimbatore” and “Contribution of Divyodaya in Coimbatore District”. The first study traces the importance of Divyodaya and its relevance to the present day India. The second study highlights the need of genuineness to promote dialogue for a better understanding among different religions.

In view of promoting the message of inter religious dialogue a newsletter was started in the beginning of Divyodaya. Eventually, the newsletter was replaced by “Divyodaya Journal of Religious Harmony and Integration” to accelerate the dialogue ministry. People from different religious backgrounds contribute their views on inter-religious dialogue and the mission of Divyodaya.

Individually and in collaboration with like-minded organizations, Divyodaya organizes a number of programmes throughout the year to realize the mission of Divyodaya. Inter religious celebrations of the major festivals of religions are occasions of closer interaction with religious leaders. Training programmes, camps and competitions for the youth are meant to develop their leadership skills and to deepen and clarify their perception of values. Divyodaya shares its platform to share and express the views and ideas on spiritual, social or temporal matters. To awaken and develop a spiritual awareness among the people meditation, yoga and inter-religious prayer sessions are conducted. *Sangamam* is organized to strengthen the fellowship through discourses, sharing of experiences, pilgrimage to religious places and peace rallies. Organizations, village forums and the youth are given awards for their efforts and contributions to promote harmony every year. Divyodaya provides facilities for the study and research on the cultural and spiritual heritage of our country. A well equipped library, meditation room, an art gallery on religious harmony are open to the public at Divyodaya campus. *Stupa*, a Peace Monument of 14.3 feet in height in terracotta has been built on the premises of Divyodaya to mark its Silver Jubilee depicting symbolically the values of different faith traditions. It highlights the message of unity in diversity.

Theological Perspectives

Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. This Kingdom is of a new social order based on the values of the Gospel: love, respect for the dignity of the human person and justice. "All positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom" (Dialogue and Proclamation, 9). Bringing the followers of all religions together in a spirit of understanding and respect itself is a part of Evangelization (*Redemptoris Missio* 55). Where there is no fear of conversion and no attitude of superiority, there grows an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and understanding and God is at work in such a fellowship (Dialogue and Mission, 40). This is the experience one gathers seeing the wholehearted cooperation of the people involved in the various activities of this dialogue centre. Besides, when they realize that their services are accepted and valued at Divyodaya in spite of religious differences, their commitment to this noble cause, as has been witnessed so far, is really heartening. Divyodaya too, snatching at every opportunity, never failed to honour as well as encourage the magnanimous services of such members of other faiths whenever and wherever possible.

In the context of religious pluralism, the mission of the Church needs to be dialogical. It has to take into account three dimensions: dialogue with local cultures, with other religious traditions and with the poor (FABC, 1974). The collaborative approach adopted, necessitates the interaction with these dimensions and that itself becomes a missionary activity. It is being with people, responding to their needs and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence and sharing (Saldanha, 74). In this context, dialogue becomes proclamation, since both are part of the Church's mission. "In dialogue, we listen to what God has done for others; in proclamation, we share what God has done for us in Jesus" (Delima, 901) who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14: 6).

This mission of the Church is "single but complex and articulated reality" but not the monopoly of the Church (Dialogue and Mission, 13; Dialogue in the Official Teaching 820). She is only the servant of the kingdom and is invited to join hands with all those who work for similar goals. Thus instead of giving priority to expand the institutions

of the church, if we could keep the priorities of the kingdom in mind, we would find partners in our mission from people beyond the bars of caste and creed (Dialogue in the Official Teaching 180).

Evangelii Nuntiandi highlights the sacramental and the servant models of the Church. Intrinsically it initiates a change of understanding from “a Church-centred mission to a mission-centred Church” (Saldanha, J, 2006, pp.64-66). The Church envisages renewing humanity through the “evangelization of cultures” (EN 20). Hence, the goal of evangelization is understood not merely in quantitative terms (cf. EN 49, 50, 57) but “as striving to effect a qualitative change in humanity” (Delima, G, 2007, pp. 897-902). This approach necessitates the building up of relationships among people of different faith traditions. Inter-religious dialogue and dialogue through activities in this context are meant to build up relationship, a relationship truly based on Jesus’ precept: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Faith in Christ urges one to respect the religious sentiments of others and to promote fellowship based on love.

Inter-religious dialogue is “a manner of acting, an attitude, a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, modes of expression and values” (Dialogue and Mission 29; Dialogue in the Official Teaching 836). “Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary means of every form of Christian Mission.... Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel” (Ibid.). Mutual listening and understanding replaces misconceptions. The dialogical dimension of proclamation has therefore to be “progressive and patient, keeping pace with those who hear the message, respecting their freedom and even their slowness to believe” (EN 79). In this context, Divyodaya’s dialogue activities and the awareness of the spiritual treasures of other religions and its attitude of openness to meet, listen and get acquainted with the life and practices of the members of other religions has opened a new way for a closer involvement with people around.

The aim of dialogue is to promote harmonious relationship among all people and to create an atmosphere for working together for peace, justice and other fundamental issues relating to humanity as a whole. Openness to other religions helps to purify and enrich each other’s

faith. Through dialogue eyes are opened to the wonderful riches of God present in other religions and cultures, of a God who wants the salvation of all and who is active in them through His spirit to realize His plan. The recent documents of the Church acknowledge the divine saving presence in the cultures and religions of the world. Realizing that a dogmatic approach would not be fruitful in India -where the mindset of the people is more synthetic, seeing unity in plurality unlike the mindset of the west which is analytical and seeking to define things in clear terms, - Divyodaya has a clear vision based on the teaching of the II. Vatican Council, on the need for dialogue and cooperation with followers of other religions and has been greatly successful in it. It is a matter of pride that the Vatican Pontifical Council for Dialogue had always appreciated and encouraged Divyodaya of its unique mission: dialogue in action by creating bonds.

Divyodaya

Inter-religious Centre

63 Geetha Hall Road

Coimbatore - 641018, TN

Dialogue for Creating Harmony in the City Life

Ronnie Prabhu

The Inter-religious Harmony Movement in Bangalore has created a culture of respect for the religious otherness of the other through its educative, spiritual and academic programmes

The Harmony Movement

It all began like this. An occasion arose sometime in 1974, when we were to have a prayer as part of a larger meeting at Ashirvad,

Bangalore, a meeting in which people of different religions were present. We took the occasion to make it a non-sectarian prayer, so that all could actively participate in it. In the early seventies such a meeting was a rarity. This was a kind of novel experience with a distinct Indian touch, with bhajans, with meditations and readings from various Scriptures.

Then on we started organizing more such meetings. We were fortunate that participants included people from all religions around: they were mostly Hindus, with a good sprinkling of Muslims, Jains, Parsees, Sikhs and Buddhists. We made sure that we kept the number of Catholic participants low just to keep the balance. We were even more fortunate that some stalwarts like principals of some colleges, some professionals like doctors and retired engineers, readily came for these prayer meetings. Even a professed atheist - the President of the Rationalist Association - also came because he found something different here, where people of all religions could pray together!

From the beginning we wanted to have this as a free association of people, without any formal membership, entry fees or other obligations. The format of our meetings soon got fairly crystallized with bhajans, readings from Scriptures, meditation, discourse followed by interaction or sharing of reflections and experiences, and prayer for universal peace. People of different religions took turns to give the discourse.

Occasionally we had a full day programme: a seminar on a spiritual topic like: how do I pray, or how does my religion help me cope with my difficulties etc; the sharing at these sessions came out pretty rich and personal and hence very nourishing. We also began to have an annual retreat, a residential week-end in a quiet salubrious place like Dhyanashrama or the Benedictine Monastery.

That was how the *Inter-Religious Harmony Movement* of Ashirvad came into being. Over the years with transfers of personnel at Ashirvad, with the demise of some of our stalwarts, and other factors, the group went through its ups and downs, but has managed to survive and even grow! Currently the Harmony Movement is involved in a variety of programmes: there are educative programmes to influence the minds of people, spiritual programmes to touch their

hearts and bind them together in harmony, and social programmes to have some impact on social life around.

Education for a Culture of Harmony

We find educative programmes very important because most people have a very poor knowledge of their own religion and, while what they know of other religions is still less, it is usually something largely incorrect, negative, and prejudicial. Disharmony begins in the minds of human beings! This ignorance must be dispelled if people are to cultivate a more positive attitude towards people of other religions.

Focusing on the students in colleges and teachers in educational institutions we organize two-day programmes entitled 'Understanding Religions'. The programme includes a reflection on the importance of and the means to harmony, and talks on the major religions. Each religion is covered in a period of an hour and a half, the talk being given by an expert from that religion – who however gives the talk after he first gets from the participants the questions, doubts, prejudices they have regarding that religion. Consequently there is very good interaction leading to clarification. It is always a consolation to hear young people say 'I never thought it was that way!' We have found the students keenly interested to understand religions. Similar programmes are also held specifically for teachers from various schools and colleges, since these are the ones who shape the future generation in values.

With groups of students interested in harmony in each college, as also teachers with similar interests, we started motivating each college to start a *Harmony Forum* for students with a staff guide. The Forum's task is to organize various programs and activities to promote inter-religious understanding in the educational institution. Students should be the first to work for communal harmony in troubled times.

Another kind of program we had – we had only one such – was a Certificate Course on Understanding Religions: a three credit programme covering the essential features of major religions and a serious reflection on communal conflict and means towards harmony. Such programmes can be conducted in colleges and could even be part of the curriculum in autonomous colleges.

In this line of educative programmes we have at times organized essay competitions and debates for college and university students on topics of inter-religious understanding. It is always heartwarming to get an insight into the minds of our young people in this delicate area, as manifested in their essays and speeches. By and large our young people find religion as divisive; however they want unity and harmony.

Academic Programmes

More recently we have started at Ashirvad a special Study Group interested in deeper study and understanding of the great religious philosophers of the world—an initiative of one of the members of our group. A group of 12 regular members meets twice a month for an hour and a half to read original texts (just now it is the social philosophy of Aurobindo) share their understanding and reflections on what they read together. This is an in-depth programme, and while everyone can profit in some way from it, it best suits those involved in deeper study.

An essential element in dialogue is that we appreciate the richness of religions other than our own, and enrich ourselves by learning from them. To acknowledge and take in what's beautiful elsewhere is always a sign of nobility. In our times when there is everywhere a resurgence of religion and quest for spirituality, when large numbers of people frequent ashrams and shrines, we will do well to see what it is that the human heart is longing for, what it is that spiritually satisfies it. We at Ashirvad would like to promote this. We have begun by organizing programmes for Christian Sisters and Priests to be trained in eastern forms of meditation and an understanding of eastern spirituality, given by experts.

One area of the talks we organize is a series of discourses on the mystics of the world. Every religion has its mystics, who by their deep spiritual experiences, their writings and discourses and the power that exuded from their lives have touched the hearts of many. At our meetings we get an expert to talk on a mystic, on his / her contribution to inter-religious harmony. The speaker distributes notes and extracts from the writings of the mystic to help us delve deeper in the mystic's experience. The study of mystics contributes greatly to broadening our horizons, to seeing that there are great depths and riches in religions other than our own, more than we suspected.

Meeting at the Level of Spirituality

The regular twice-a-month prayer meetings at Ashirvad have a good spiritual tone with a talk on a relevant subject given at each meeting –followed by a lot of interaction. These regular meetings have given stability to our group.

Every year followers of different religions make a retreat together. Here we have people of different faiths living together, sharing accommodation, praying together, sharing their reflections, singing out their heart's desires in bhajans, communing also in deep silence. Sessions are guided by different people, with expertise in spirituality. As in all our meetings we make sure that all prayers, bhajans - everything that is done in common is non-sectarian, so that everyone feels comfortable to join in without prejudice to his own religious susceptibilities. But during a retreat, keeping in mind that many of our participants find deep spiritual joy in singing bhajans of their own tradition, we have a session when sectarian bhajans are sung. This session for obvious reasons is kept optional.

One exercise that is particularly enriching is when people share their personal faith experiences or Scripture texts that have influenced their lives, or how their religions have helped them through crises in their lives etc. It becomes more and more obvious in these sessions that the heart of people everywhere, whatever be their religions, is the same; they have the same feelings, same dreams, same aspirations, cutting across all barriers there is the experience of oneness in these retreats.

This understanding of our common oneness in spirit is enhanced by another programme: the pilgrimage. Once in a way we organize a one-day pilgrimage covering the spiritual centres of the main religions in the city. Thus we visit a temple, a church, a gurudwara, a mosque, a Jain basidi and a Buddhist centre. We spend about an hour and a half at each centre where we are given a warm welcome, an explanation of the life and ritual at the centre, the inner meaning of their religious beliefs etc. Sometimes we are privileged to be present at the worship of that religious community – like in the gurudwara, where we also take part in the shared meal (*langar*). The externals in each of these places are very different; the inner spirit is the same.

Visiting the places of worship of other religions has besides a spiritual effect something obviously social and contributes much to harmony. One of the things we encourage is that religious institutions invite leaders and gurus of other religions to be chief guests at their social or institutional functions. The social benefit of this is obvious.

Net-working Harmony Groups

We are promoting harmony consciously, and we are aware that there are other groups too that are in their own ways doing the same. It would be a tragedy and a counter witness if there were no harmony between these groups themselves! Keeping this in mind we are ever ready to join with any other like-minded group for programmes.

We are also painfully conscious that though we have been working in the field for several years we have achieved very little; we just do not have any recognizable clout! In fact no single group can really make a very great difference; the various groups working for harmony need to work together to really widen their area of influence and make a difference.

Today there is a growing awareness of the need of dialogue for inter-religious harmony. It is becoming the accepted thing to have inter-religious prayer at our institutions with readings from different Scriptures, to have sarva-dharma sammelans as part of festivals. The public need to be constantly kept aware of these ideals of harmony so that when communal tensions arise they are more easily contained and issues settled in peace.

In rural areas it will be very helpful if all working for harmony - like NGOs - come together, organize peace marches, and get the people of a whole area take a pledge that they will not harm one another in the name of religion, that they will not let themselves be drawn into any communal conflagration. Regular programmes of this kind can make a difference.

Difficulties in dialogue work

What difficulties do we face in promoting dialogue? When a Christian group takes the initiative there is always the question that arises: is this another way of trying to convert people. This was not the question raised when we began several years ago, but it is

understandable that today, with all the propaganda made by communal political parties, people cannot help getting this question to mind; but fortunately they have seen that there has been no such agenda hidden in our work here.

In the beginning a slight problem came from Christians themselves: how can we equate our religion with other religions, what need have we to borrow from other religions when we have the fullness of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ, and how we can have any genuine dialogue without compromising our faith in Jesus as the sole and universal Mediator.

These are not really insurmountable questions. I have found that people of other religions do not mind our saying *ours is the one true religion* so long as we recognize their right to say the same of their religion, and this not in a spirit of confrontation but as an honest expression of our belief. In addition we do not say that people of other religions are condemned to hell because they have not accepted Jesus Christ. Even if we did say that once upon a time in history, we do not say that any longer after Vat II. If our dialogue work were dialogue of theologians on theological issues perhaps the affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus would pose a problem; but at the level of spiritual dialogue it has not been a problem.

I am very much convinced that there is great scope for the apostolate of dialogue among religions. And it gives me much consolation that the Church encourages this and that many groups, with initiative coming from different sources, are engaged in this work for God's greater glory.

Asirvad

30. St. Marks Road Cross
Bangalore 560001

Building Ties of Friendship with Believers of all Faiths

Clarence Srambical

Snehalay, Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue and Spirituality, Indore, tries to foster friendly inter-faith encounters to form a sound basis for a culture of dialogue.

Friendship binds hearts

As a catholic priest involved in media activities in Indore since the middle of seventies, I had a lot of opportunities to interact with believers of all faiths. I visited mainly the homes of Hindus, Muslims and Bhahais. I participated in several meetings and programmes organized by them. Hardly any Christian attended such meetings organized by believers of other faiths. In many such meetings we dealt with economic, social, educational and cultural issues. We also reflected on communal and religious concerns. Right from the beginning, I considered my presence as very important to place our point of view. I gave top priority to be present in such gatherings

Such visits and meetings became a regular feature once systematic and continuous attacks on missionary institutions began a decade ago. Anti-social and fundamentalist groups were sporadically attacking missionaries in these parts already from the fifties. But from the end of eighties these attacks became rather systematic. The politicization of prejudices and biases towards Christians and other minority communities became part of the agenda of fundamentalist forces in the country especially after the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. But then, I noticed how Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains and Christians were working together at our sound recording studio even as Babri Masjid was demolished and subsequent riots were on bringing most of the city under the curfew. The friendship formed in shared work situation in recording music helped us to transcend the barriers of religions and communal divisions.

It was then that it dawned on me that I should free myself from other administrative types of work and engage myself in dialogue of life and activities to build bridges across communities and establish good contacts with significant individuals. With this in view I joined Snehalay, a centre for inter-religious dialogue and spirituality in 2005.

Snehalay, a House of Friendship

Visiting the homes of believers of other faiths was a learning experience for me. I learned to respect and appreciate the magnanimity and generosity of many believers of other faiths. I also met persons of deep spirituality and values and was happy to establish ties of friendship with many of them. I found great openness towards Jesus among these people. I would like to mention one of the incidents of those days. Once before the social situations deteriorated I was going about screening the film, "Jesus" in the outskirts of Indore in Tillore, a village about 20 km away. Though we were supposed to present the film in the primary school, after having reached the village, I thought the best place to project the film would be the temple wall. Reading my mind, even before I could propose the idea, the temple priest suggested to me that he had no objection if we wanted to project the film on temple premises. We not only presented the film that day using the temple premises but were invited to show it once again because the women folk had not seen it. I wondered loud with my companions, what would be the reaction of a catholic priest, if believers of another faith would request the showing of their religious film on church premises!

During my interactions with believers of other faith, I was also exposed to some of their negative outlook towards Christians. I was surprised to note the ignorance about Christians even among the educated. Caricatures, biases, prejudices and stereotypes continuously promoted by all types of rumors and particularly by the media shaped their world-view. This was happening despite the contribution of Christians for the social transformation and human development of peoples through schools, hostels, dispensaries, health centres, hospitals, social development programmes, information centres, press and communication centres. Christian missionaries for the last two hundred years have been reaching out to the remote areas of the state especially among the poor and the marginalized.

Regardless of such contributions in a variety of fields, there has been a lot of mistrust of Christian institutions. Often their presence has been misunderstood. They were accused of providing allurements to the poor to change their religion. They were also unreasonably blamed for destabilizing society by promoting a foreign culture and religion. Such accusations could stick because ordinary people could identify Christians with English medium schools, church compound ghettos and special food and dressing habits. Further, the people of dominant faith felt threatened with the power wielded by many educational institutions though they made use of the services provided by such institutions. Church personnel were easily branded as foreigners with access to foreign funds to subvert the Indian polity.

Consequently, I soon realized that the only way to remove such ignorance is fostering ties of friendships across communities. Constant friendly interactions can remove many misconceptions about each other. Once a media tycoon, despite being the guest of honour on our premises in a function organized at our centre, chided the missionaries for undermining the culture of the local people. Being our guest we did not embarrass him by any defense at that time but kept continuous contact with him by updating him with our activities and programmes. A year later once again he was attending one of our programmes. From being in the audience he requested that he be allowed to say a few words. He came to the stage to publicly acknowledge how mistaken he had been about Christians. He said that he knew that Christians conducted schools, hospitals and organized social programmes but that it was for the first time he became aware how Christians were promoting authentic Indian culture and values. He further added that he had been closely observing the activities of Satprakashan seeing it as a gift to the city. No doubt, the team here was functioning like a salt, leaven and light quietly triggering off a transformation in the values and attitudes of several who came in contact with them.

My friends who had become familiar and intimate with me would share their concerns especially when anti-social elements unleashed their attacks on several institutions in western Madhya Pradesh and other parts of the country. They would invariably say: "Nothing like that is going to happen here, for we know you. Why don't other

Fathers and Sisters interact with people of other faiths like you?" These were occasions for me to explain and clear many myths about Christians and especially the missionaries working in these parts of India.

Initiatives of Friendship

My friends of other faiths several times mentioned the importance of Christian presence in the main-stream gatherings of the city so that many misconceptions could be clarified. Accordingly I make sure that I participate in many programmes organized by people of other faiths.

From the nineties, with the arrival of John Saccidananda, an ex-air force officer, I got involved in Dharma Rajya Veda, an inter-religious undertaking. Later this association developed the Institute of Value Education for a civilization of peace at Indore. Presently, the association is known as: 'Universal Solidarity Movement', taking into account the aspirations of people from all over that have joined the movement. I have been associated with their publication, *Renaissance*, which comes out six times a year right from its inception in 1993. I write the editorial highlighting values from an inter-religious spiritual perspective. Here at USM, we also began to experiment a new style of inter-religious prayer at which short readings from different scriptures are read meditatively with intervals of silence in between. We also sing bhajans and hymns but no discussion is held during such prayer meetings. All attempts are to listen to the Spirit speaking through the scriptures in silence and awaken one's consciousness about his presence in them.

Snehalay opens its premises to people of all faiths. Occasional one day meetings are held. The premises are frequented by Jitu Krishnamurthy study group and Gandhians. Individuals with diverse religious backgrounds make use of the premises for prayer and meditation.

After the assassination of Sr. Rani Maria we organized "United Christian Forum for Human Rights, Indore" (UCFFHRI) together with like minded persons from other Christian denominations in 1995. Since then, I have been serving this association as its chairperson.

This association has interacted proactively along with other like minded associations and non-government organizations run by people of other faiths to highlight the common concerns of the citizens and also represent the concerns of Christians to the administration in collaboration with them. Increasingly UCFFHRI is playing an important role to bring about communal harmony and greater understanding among believers of various faiths. The stress has been on fostering friendship that can transcend the barriers of one's religions, cultures, languages, and regions. With this in view the UCFFHRI has been organizing from time to time talks, panel discussions and sharing sessions for Christians with people of other faiths.

I believe that genuine friendship is prophetic. Friendship opens up a sacred space between individuals and communities. It is this space that builds up trust and respect for each other to enter into prophetic dialogue on the topics of the day that ultimately takes you to deeper questions of each other's identity and cherished values.

While encouraging each other, we also challenge each other rooted in our personal spiritual background. My identity as a disciple of Jesus is known and acknowledged by others. Being rooted in the Spirit of Jesus I can acknowledge the great faith and the many signs of the presence of the Spirit among the believers of other faiths. Thus the stress will be on spirituality rather than on religiosity because spirituality enables us to find a lot of common ground between believers of all faiths. Such encounters enable us to grow in the Spirit often transcending the barriers of limitations that society and culture hold dear, to a realization of what Jesus held dear when he said: "Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"(Mt.12:50)

Snehalay
PB. 19, Kasturbagram
Indore - 452020, MP

Dialogue as a Spiritual Pilgrimage

Albert Nambiaparambil

Albert Nambiaparambil CMI has been for many years the Secretary of the Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Catholic Bishops Conference of India. After having initiated many dialogue projects all over India he is now engaged in networking the Organizations committed to a culture of inter-religious harmony.

Converging on the Seashore

It was an evening of August 1993. I was standing on the terrace of San Thome Dialogue Centre, Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India. My look was focused on the golden rays of the setting sun. Out there in the ocean was the Vivekananda Rock, with the monument to the sacred memories of Swami Vivekananda, a pilgrim from the East to the West. I was then in Kanyakumari to prepare the World Celebration of '*unity and life*', marking the centenary of the Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1893. This was being organized by the World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils.

The waves were reaching the shore marking the end of their convergent, divergent and repellent currents. I remembered the story told by Swami Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Chicago, about the dialogue between a frog in the well and a frog from the sea. The bone of contention or the issue of dialogue was about the size of the sea, in comparison with that of the well. The well-frog insisted that there can be nothing bigger than his well. Turning to the religious people gathered in the very first parliament of the kind, Swami Vivekananda wound up saying that Hindus, Muslims, Christians are caught up in this game of seeking the central place for themselves.

I was thinking about a symbolic expression for the cover page of the souvenir that we were trying to bring out during the inaugural function of our WFIRC assembly, marking the centenary of the Chicago-parliament of religions. I drew in mind this picture of the

monument to Vivekananda, the Church on the sea-shore facing the monument and the Mosque nearby – the three-in-one picture. At the back of my mind I had the long cherished picture of children playing on the seashore – an image drawn from the *Gitanjali* of Tagore. This was the cover design of the souvenir of our assembly of 1993. That particular inter-faith event of Kanyakumari had its climax in the inter-faith procession to the seashore: as fellow-pilgrims we held in our hands symbols and posters drawn from different religious traditions. We stopped on the way for each of the nine religious traditions and prayed for the believers of the faith community in focus. Forming us into a circle around a campfire we celebrated the newly emerging communion of hearts and minds in songs, bhajans and prayers. The vibrations of the songs that we sang together as, ‘*we shall overcome...*’ or ‘*we will be together for ever*’ were of help to recollect the key notes of the parting fellow-pilgrims.

Exodus from Self-Sufficiency

I was in Dharmaram College, Bangalore, in December 1963, with the assignment of teaching philosophy. Taking impetus from the fresh winds blowing within the Church following the Second Vatican Council, a few of us started a group, meeting in homes regularly, almost every month, over a cup of tea. We shared our reflections on different topics. We were Hindus, Muslims and Christians. I met a few of these dialogue-friends in the regular organized meets of the Indian Institute of World Culture of Bangalore. The annual gatherings of the Indian Philosophical Congress gave me opportunities for dialogic exposure through a process of growing by sharing. Under the direction of the historian of philosophy, Frederick Copleston s.j. I had my tuning in to the boundaries of languages, as I did my doctoral research at the Gregorian University, Rome. This preparation helped me to listen to others, to open out to those of other traditions, searching for the contexts of their language-game. Slowly, steadily, the networking among us dialogue-partners began to grow, along with the confidence in the dialogue-game.

In 2007, as I look back on those years of tentative steps taken in the path of dialogue, I feel positive about the over-all picture of the dialogue scene today. I would say that this note is positive, in spite of

the remarks from skeptics. The overall picture emerging from the media often gives a negative impression. Worth mentioning here may be the fall out from a recent document of the Vatican Congregation for Doctrine and Faith about Protestant Churches. There was a similar shock in the dialogue-world, after the Vatican document *Dominus Jesus*. One might question the positive picture that I would like to draw contrasting it to the growing inter-faith conflicts in India and outside, the revivalist and fanatic trends within one or other religious tradition. *Terrorism* is a word that is being linked with religion in the media and in common talk as well. Globalization is a phenomenon that is affecting the inter-religious scene with positive and negative effects.

My entry into the field of dialogue, back in the sixties, was for me and for my inter-faith friends an experience of exodus from a self-sufficiency complex. The Second Vatican Council set in motion the waves of inter-faith dialogue, with a call to dialogue, with a positive picture about the other religious traditions. Our attempts at taking the very first steps of inter-faith dialogue were made along with the movements for adaptation, inculturation, and liturgical experimentation.

‘I feel within me a tension between self-identity and openness’ was the frank confession of a Church leader, who inaugurated one of our important inter-faith initiatives. I had, in those early years, received warning notes on *spurious dialogues* from my friends within the Catholic communion, who in all sincerity and earnestness found the dialogue initiatives as compromising on the uniqueness of Christian faith and as a departure from the duty of proclamation, evangelization and mission.

The dialogue-partners too had their doubts about the intention of our dialogue-steps: are they rather new steps with a hidden agenda of ‘conversion’. I recall the mood of some of the participants of the very first inter-faith assembly at Kochi in 1981. That was on the background of the mass conversion of a village – *Meenakshipuram* – to Islam. To our surprise, the then governor of Kerala, Mrs. Jyothi Venkatachalam, stated in the inaugural address that conversion was to be considered as something natural. The issue was taken up in the group discussions and the decisions that emerged in and through the

deliberations was a liberating experience affirming the right to conversion. There was a note too that the use of inducement is to be avoided in the process. I mention this here because this was a contention shadowing the interfaith relations and encounters. At the Millennium Peace Summit, in which I was a participant, we ironed out our way from moments of tension built around this issue with the formula that Christians and Hindus have to win each other's confidence that the giving of aids is not misused.

Back in the seventies, I was continuously on the move in India organizing inter-faith panel sessions on '*values in a fast changing world*'. Responding to the question, whether human rights include the right to move from one religion to another or to no religion at all, the consensus of responses was that this right is part of human rights. But, when the question was raised on the right to *convert* another, the response was in the negative or divided.

Networking Dialogue Initiatives

Meeting believers from different religious traditions in Mumbai, Pope Paul VI described dialogue-partners as 'pilgrims set out to find God'. Helping out in this inter-faith pilgrimage, the contribution of different centers of dialogue, known by different names, is worth mentioning. There are many such centers committed to and promoting interfaith dialogue across the country.

I am at present director of an inter-faith centre known as *Upasana* at Thodupuzha, Kerala. It is accepted by all as a center for religious-cultural integration. *Upasana* offers the service of a library and reading room, open to the public of all faiths. Inter-faith meets are held every Sunday, without break, for the last 22 years. Another center for inter-faith harmony is *Ashirvad* in Bangalore. It brings people of different religious traditions together twice a month.

Although the first organized initiatives in this field were from the Christian side, slowly other religious traditions took up the work of bringing believers together. I had been a participant in three inter-faith meets organized by a Hindu Ashram in Mathura. It was great that Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil was the guest of honor in one of the dialogue-meets held in connection with the Kumbhamela, at Allahabad, in 2007.

If dialogue is between persons than between systems, these chains or circles of believers in genuine and authentic openness can be seen as the nerve centers of pilgrims of dialogue. It is a matter of great joy and hope for people involved in dialogue that there are active inter-faith centers and groups spread out in this our country. They are instrumental in bringing people of different faiths and traditions, of different ideologies, in the celebration of the realities of life. They celebrate the festivals of different religious and national festivals giving them a spiritual flavor and unitive thrust. At the heart of these celebrations is the experiential expression of union and communion. In turn, such centers and groups become agencies of change in the attitudes of the partners in dialogue, and catalysts in lasting social change. Inter-faith dialogue is for the partners an exposure to a confidence generating experience.

Critical Self-introspection

Inter-faith exposure gives the partners an incentive to become aware of the limitation of the traditional language of their own faith: the most perfect religion, the only revealed religion, the fulfillment of religions, the latest in the history of religions, the most ancient one etc. I recall that a kind of self-sufficiency was so natural to me in meeting these others, who too displayed similar exclusive attitudes. These pictures of self-understanding were challenged, redrawn, modified to adjust others in dialogic growth. Symbols of different religions are often placed in a circle in order to bring out the new emerging picture of pluralistic self-understanding. I feel happier with an atomic structure with a burning lamp placed at the centre, though this picture is deficient in expressing my own insertion to the pilgrimage of dialogue. Fellow-pilgrims in dialogue are redrawing their own pictures, bringing in more inclusive paradigms, revisiting their scriptures and reinterpreting their traditions in a more inclusive sense.

Although it is very true that dialogue is between persons rather than between systems or ideologies, in this process there is and there will be a dialogue within the very communities of insertion. Words and symbols are to be tested and new creative symbols and expressions are to be discovered and creatively used in the experiential encounters.

This is the emerging reality in the dialogue of life. I recall an instance at the celebration of the very first World Assembly of Religions that was held at Kochi in 1981. We had to bring in a confessional statement in the final declaration, expressing the inability of our language to say what we wanted to say. Our words and phrases were too much theistic for the Buddhist participants at the meet. In a recent Hindu Muslim dialogue organized at Raman Reti, in Gokul of Mathura, by Swami Gurusharananda of Udaseen Ashram, it was great to witness the Islamic participants examining their own tradition, to find a place for some kind of worship with sacred symbols or images for those devotees who need them.

Authenticity of our own practices at home is often questioned in this pilgrimage of dialogue partners. Let me illustrate this by an example. Till the 'Church in India Seminar' of 1969 it was taken for granted that our educational institutions had the duty to give religious instruction to our own students and some kind of moral instruction or value-education to those of other faiths. The question was raised as to our duty to provide for religious instruction to students from other religions entrusted to our care. It was put off in the seventies, when the matter came up for discussion. The drafting committee appointed by the CBCI commission for dialogue, led by Fr. Gispert Sauch, s.j., was preparing the *Guidelines for Dialogue*. A few years later, when the fresh edition of the Guidelines was redrafted, this concern was accepted as a duty on us Christian educators. We have to provide for the religious education of those of other faiths by competent persons from these traditions wherever possible. I had occasions to draw on this as an example of conversion within the community as a fruit of inter-faith encounter. I did even make a request that the other dialogue partners too make similar exercises in their own communities.

In this rather new focus on dialogue a few questions are being raised such as: the relation between the service of inter-faith dialogue and the ministry of proclamation, between conversion and dialogue; uniqueness of Christ and the normativity of Christianity; Christocentrism versus theo-centrism; salvation of those of other faith-traditions, the redemptive value of these religions; inter-communion in the context of on-going dialogue. A self-examination does take

place on the background of the inclusive, exclusive, pluralistic, fanatic, revivalist tendencies within the traditions in relation to active engagement with other traditions. An open-ended engagement in dialogue coupled with an authentic fidelity to the different heritages will, I hope, help the dialogue-pilgrims to seek and find new answers to these and other issues.

One of the side-effects of involvement in inter-faith dialogue may be a dissatisfaction with certain terminologies that were satisfactory in non-dialogic contexts. To refer to other religions the word 'non-christian' was in use for long. Now this is replaced by positive terms as sisters and brothers of other faiths, fellow-travelers, co-pilgrims and partners in dialogue. Terms like 'anonymous-christians', are rarely in use, when we refer to those of other faiths. There is a shift from the 'having', the 'possessive' language to a 'being', to a 'pilgrimage' or 'Kingdom of God' language.

In the early stage of dialogue activities, the tendency was to bring together people of different faith-traditions to share their reflections on faith tenets or on topics of common concern. Readings from different sacred scriptures were selected as part of the prayer service. Back in the seventies, as an expression of our dialogue-involvement, 'live-together' sessions, lasting three to four days, were tried, with participants from different faiths. I recall the very first interfaith 'live-together' experiment, organized in Varanasi in February, 1973 by the dialogue commission of the C.B.C.I. There was the obvious shift from discussions on religion to shared stories, anecdotes, prayers, meditations, *satsangs*, inter-faith processions etc. Commitment to the protection of the environment, to the human and humane issues, to the oppressed sections in our midst, to the HIV/Aids victims and to the awareness actions called for, to the common celebration of the festivals and realities of life etc. are now finding significant place in inter-faith projects.

Respecting Differences

An area wherein the players in the 'language games' of inter-religious dialogue often fail is there, where we overstep the boundaries of the use of our own religious language. I make it my habit to raise this in inter-faith meets. Here I borrow from Ludwig Wittgenstein a

tool for testing meaningful language. Our language, especially religious language, gets meaning within the particular context of use. Often unawares the partners may be making a jump from 'faith' language to a 'knowledge' language, for instance in discussions on *rebirth* or *reincarnation* or *salvation* or *Trinity*. In recent years, when I am asked to reflect on the on-going dialogues with their problems and challenges, I take time to point to the beautiful languages of our own kitchens. They make sense within the 'kitchen', but outside this kitchen they may fail to evoke the same vibrations.

So too, we have to be sensitive to the differences in the time-visions involved. I try to remind our dialogue friends that both the one who accepts rebirth and the one who denies rebirth may continue to agree that life is not over with the physical death. Or another example: the use of the word 'only' is all-inclusive in the Semitic linear time-vision, while the same word may sound 'exclusive' when said or heard, in the Indian spiral vision of time.

At an earlier stage of inter-faith encounters, the main tendency of the partners was to pick up the common elements, and to tone down the differences. But there is a growth among dialogue friends to appreciate the differences. There was the emphasis on *global ethics* at an assembly of WCRP and at the Centenary Meet of the Chicago Parliament in 1993. Here too the differences are vital. Thus the reason for *ahimsa-nonviolence* in a Jain believer is different from that of someone who doesn't belong to this faith, though both would sign on a document of global ethics. Calling attention to the common elements, to the common factors as well as to the differences is definitely a sign of growth.

One factor that is to be kept in mind by dialogue pilgrims is that of the sharing of our own stereotypes and prejudices about our partners in dialogue. A few of us tried this out, in CSR, Pariyaram, Chalakudy, in 2007 towards the end of our inter-faith retreat. Although a few shared their fears and doubts about this step, this turned out to be a very rewarding experience of growing by sharing.

At the meet organized in April 2007, in Bangalore, by the dialogue commission of the C.B.C.I. the slogan or motto '*to be religious is to*

be inter-religious' was used. This slogan was raised recently in other gatherings of dialogue partners too. There is no more that preoccupation with finding reasons for justifying the commitment to inter-religious dialogue. Rather the concern for fellow pilgrims is with the on-going intra-religious dialogue and with the issues affecting all pilgrims. There is focus on the marginalized, the oppressed, along with the quest for an ecological and sustainable development. Along with this, there is a search for a global spirituality and for creative expressions of the pilgrimage of spiritual communion that is inter-religious dialogue.

Upasana

Thodupuzha- 685584

Idukki Dt., Kerala.

Dialogue for Human Solidarity

T. K. John

T.K. John, Professor of Theology at Vidyajyoti, Delhi, reaches out to several religious organisations and secular movements in the campaign for peace and justice, reconciliation and the welfare of the poor.

Harmony begins with the Cradle

Twilight in rural Kerala is aesthetically and religiously elevating for the mind, and exhilaration for the soul. One is transported into another world. There is the post *pooja*-call of the conch from the temple, a call to the people of the village to turn homeward from the field after the day's labour. And, it is also an invitation to remember the indebtedness of all life to the Divine. The chiming of the angelus bell from the church sounds in the ears and echoes in the heart, with the same message. The conch and the bell seem to act simultaneously as benign agents of an integral culture: summoning people to turn to

the core of all beings, to the centre of all life, to God, at the end of the day. Many a village celebrations reinforces this religious-cultural intermingling of sentiments in the village folks. Towers of temples and steeples of churches rising above the green carpet that is the Kerala landscape, give visibility too to a composite culture that is alive. Truly enchanting is the endearing sight of temple elephants leading processions in the parish church vibrating its silent dialogical pedagogy deep in our hearts – of honourable amity across religious diversity. Hindu poets and Christian literary critics and novelists deepen and interpret the significance of these trends for our adolescent minds at school. Such atmosphere sows in young minds at schools seeds of what now is called a culture of plurality. To the children of the village, and to the students of the village school, differences in belief and rituals are healthily real, and yet people of both Hindu and Christian traditions weave a nice fabric: inter-religious harmony. Inter-religiosity enters into our blood stream at an early stage of our life and it is through it that our eyes turn to our neighbours. I recall these twilight experiences to locate subsequent developments, especially in and around Delhi, as blossoming of the seeds sown in my early childhood days. Village is virtually a Kindergarten for the actual inter-religious culture.

Born into a peasant family and steeped in paddy cultivation I compare my journey through religions and cultures to my trekking through the different terraces in paddy fields. I was drinking from the Christian wellsprings, yet breathing the refreshing air of all religions. Fascination for some of the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain sages and their spiritual teachings was born in my heart early in life. This prompted me to dive into Hindu scriptures at the research level. Therein I was deeply immersed and was inspired by the wealthy heritage of India. With that as part of my cultural package I found myself moving enthusiastically to another realm, that of human rights. That still persists. I re-entered Hinduism this time not in the philosophical traditions and systems but at the level of popular religiosity of the large majority of practitioners in that realm. Currently I am involved in the affairs of those whom the dominant social order had expelled as unwanted and of limited value, namely the Dalits. To me all these were inter-religious interactions.

Religion and Custodial Death.

Inter-religious dialogue is not primarily an epitome of friendly exchanges on experiences, rituals, doctrines and celebrations. Religions vindicate their claim and title when they are present where they originally were born - at the travails of the hapless human caravan.

On a July evening a memorial service was held in a small spot among the *jhuggies* (shanties) in a Delhi slum then known as Sultanpuri. It was also a protest meeting. Custodial death of one of the inhabitants, a rag picker, was the occasion. A slum dweller could be easily suspected of stealing, picked up by the police, produced before the local court or locked up. One such victim of the cruel system was kept in police lock up for twelve days and released on thirteenth day. The languishing victim of torture died in a municipal hospital late that evening.

Human rights activists, a sprinkling of academics, a few lawyers, neighbours and sympathizers of the slum constituted the gathering. Moments of silence, expressions of sympathy for the deceased, reading of short passages from different scriptures, expressions of angry protest against custodial death in police lock up, and discussion on the course of action to be followed marked the proceedings. There were Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs in the silence-marked gathering. Even a few *agnostics*. They came together because of the conviction that the life, with its dignity, rights and freedom of every Indian, is precious, non-negotiable and inviolable. These are authentically religious values and issues precisely because they are constitutive of the human person. Religion has its roots at that level. These are not to be trampled under foot – by the State, by the dominant groups, by the society at large. Religions should be the first to take up advocacy of these rights.

When we got dispersed a human bond was emerging across diverse creeds and ideologies. It was the human spirit that emerged to become a mobilizing force against violence on the human person's constitutive nature.

It is events like this that formed the beginning of an interesting experiment in interaction with (one may call it by a milder and harmless

word 'dialogue') believers and non-believers alike in Delhi. The human person, the Indian citizen, was the rallying point of these groups. One could term it inter-religious dialogue with a social content.

Dousing Flames and Fires of Conflict

Shocks and dismay at the parting of ways among friends and neighbours on grounds of religion, and turning on each other with mortal intentions act like diamond on the glass. This was what happened in the country, especially in Delhi, in 1984.

The assassination of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi had led to sudden irruptions of widespread anger. This led to organized assault on the Sikh population of Delhi and beyond. Burning down of gurudwaras and holy books, setting fire to their homes and business establishments and slaughter of a large number of Sikhs went on for a couple of days. Delhi citizens – academics, activists, members of the civil society in large numbers – responded in unison by forming groups consisting of people of all faiths and ideologies.

Organizing urgent relief to the affected living in camps, school halls and other protected places began in full swing by the civil society. Then the need was felt to work for reconciliation among the two estranged communities. Reconciliation between the two estranged groups and healing of the wounds had priority in these undertakings. Gradually probing into the root causes of such irreligious frenzy was part of the concern. How is it that with claims to the knowledge and experience of the Divine, religions become sectarian, their claims to identity often marked by rigid exclusivism, fuming hatred and vengeance on offenders, high display of emotionalism beclouding the rational and the critical? It was a unique experience of people of all persuasions pooling together the best in them as humans to attend to a human tragedy at the hands of the humans. Differences were left behind.

These efforts led to the emergence of a frontal organization known as *Sampradayika Virodhi Andholan* (Front for Engaging with Communalism). It functioned for years among university students and academics as well as among members of the civil society. Such initiatives were inspired by values and perceptions which each drew

from ones' own religious heritage. Inspiration came from the ethical, moral and spiritual wellsprings that were within each. It was a pooling together and mingling of the residue of insights and values capable of enhancing the quality human life. I am inclined to give greater depth to such expressions of religiosity than mere verbal exchange or shared rituals.

Reconciliation beyond the Frontiers

Let me present here an ongoing dialogue born of such civil society initiatives across the *dividing border*. I refer to the birth growth and activities of an interesting movement today known as *Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy*. A light-blue booklet was distributed among the Indian passengers in the Karachi bound train from Lahore four years ago. They were members of the 250 strong Indian contingent, members of the India Chapter of the Forum. The title of the booklet was *Surely we can Talk again*, edited by M.H. Askari. It was an anthology of Pakistani writings on peace between India and Pakistan. The question, "Should Pakistan and India Bury the Hatchet?" was posed by the Karachi based *Dawn* to a number of writers, activists, ex-army men and intellectuals. Very encouraging response came from an impressive array of seasoned minds.

"If we value life, our two countries have no choice but to make peace," Said Uzma Aslam Khan, author of many books. Dr. Aslam Farruki, researcher and literary critic, further elaborated: "Friendship has always taken precedence over enmity for sensible people. Love is a more powerful tool than hatred to resolve problems. Pakistan and India should know. They have fought wars but not a single problem was resolved on the battlefield an matters went from bad to worse. Mercifully they are now coming to understand the truth and efforts are afoot to bring about reconciliation between them". "More than a hundred thousand innocent lives were lost in the process. Billions were spent on military expenditures that could have been used to feed the poor, educate the children, minimize corruption and institutionalize sustainable development", bemoaned Ahmad Faruqi, economist and author of several books.

Over a dozen high ranking and committed authors expressed sentiments that were and are still very sane, civilizing, and manifestly and boldly counter to the prevailing negative sentiments indulged in by satraps that control the reins in both countries, and even from abroad. The peace initiative between peoples of both Pakistan and India has been going on for over a dozen years. What is remarkable here is that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, believers of traditions that vary, are committed to the project. What brings all these diverse believers together is something humanizing. But each one draws inspiration from her/his religious tradition.

And what is the objective of this Forum? Here is an extract from the Bangalore declaration of the joint convention: "Demands an immediate resumption of dialogue at the highest level, reversal of current military build-ups, horizontal and vertical denuclearization and a comprehensive non-war pact, effective steps towards internal demilitarization and in the interim, until a complete roll back of the nuclear weapons and delivery systems programmes of both countries, a no-first use agreement, consent to the CTBT, rejoining the discussions on the FMCT and move towards the declaration of South Asia as a nuclear-free zone." (Fifth Joint Declaration, Bangalore, April 6-8, 2000, p.5).

The Forum has been functioning with a wide range of objectives like settlement of dispute in Kashmir respecting the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, striving for permanent peace and harmony in India and Pakistan, promotion of trade and commerce between the two countries, taking effective steps to free society from the forces of communalism, exchange of artists, writers and researchers, advocacy of demilitarization and diversion of the colossal military expenditure towards elimination of illiteracy, poverty and other urgent human problems of the subcontinent.

The poem of Muhammad Ibn', Arabic, mystic, philosopher, poet, sage, (1165-1240), inspires every one:

My heart is open to all winds:

It is a pasture for gazelles

And a home for Christian monks

A temple for idols
 The Black Stone of the Mecca pilgrim,
 The table of the Torah, and the book of the Koran.
 Wherever God's caravans turn,
 The religion of love shall be my religion
 And my faith"

At a recently held inter-faith gathering in which scholars and dignitaries from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka were participants a dominant trend was for forging solidarity across religions in order to attend to justice, rights and peace. Sound religiosity demands, it was felt, that wherever any human person, irrespective of creed or race or culture, is found victim of violence or injustice we believers should be the first to intervene. True religiosity should bring about a re-education of all of us.

The Sources of Inspiration

A distinctive phenomenon of this era has been the quest for identity—personal, cultural, racial or religious. My person, my family, my clan, my caste, my state, my religion – are expressions that signal existence of a boundary around each identity. Emergence of a consciousness of inter-relatedness as constitutive of the human family has been placing severe demands on these boundary-marked identities. It is in the realm of religion that this experience has been rigidly enforced and tenaciously observed. By attending to human issues the deepest in the human is manifested. And, the deepest in the human is profoundly spiritual, whatever religious persuasion one may belong to. On such occasions the boundary walls become subject to relativization. It even collapses.

Rajghat in New Delhi, the national Samadhi in memory of the Father of the Nation, has been another place where the coming together of committed people aimed at impacting society with sanity peace and goodwill towards all has been taking place. What brings us together is the wounds of the society, the bleeding sector of the Indian society. Local, regional or national and even international eruptions of violence, or of manifestations of callousness of humans to other humans, need prompt response. The initiative comes from these small

groups. The surprise cry *Hey Ram* from the Samadhi of Gandhi inspires the initiatives of many advocates of peace, harmony and reconciliation.

It is as a believer in Jesus Christ, rooted in the Judeo-Christian heritage, that the above observations narrations and reflections are presented. It is also as an Indian rooted in and owning the Indic heritage that one interacts with another world, with another religious culture. The sum and substance of the narration has been a creative interaction, a dialogue, with the many sectors of the two heritages from which, as pigeons draw ointment from its own feather-roots to smoothen the feathers for speedy navigation through the air, so each one draws from her/his tradition to apply to today's needs and problems. The aim is speedy travel together.

Historically most religions trace their origin to basic burning human issues. Social, economic, political and cultural oppression of the Jewish population in Egypt prepared the ground for divine intervention through Moses' instrumentality. Judeo-Christian tradition has its origin at this distress experience of a people. The manifold sufferings to which the humans are subject provoked the brooding Siddhartha to undertake the great *exodus*. Tribal religions are intimately associated with aspects of agrarian life. So was the early phase of Hinduism as evidenced by the hymns of the Rigveda. Situations carried out by the warlords in Western Asia played a similar role in the origin of Islam.

Christian theology has been groping to locate the diverse experiences and interpret them. This writer has been told again and again by fellow travellers in Delhi that this (referring to the collaboration that the institution has been entering into), indeed is a new face of Christianity. It is hoped that "that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church"(LG,1) will keep the track ever brighter. One understands that inter-religious dialogue with a social content comes closer to the event of the Incarnation, for Jesus Christ is then seen as fully immersed in the affairs of the people of his times.

Formation for Dialogue at the Grass Roots Level

M. Jeyaraj

M.Jeyaraj, taking inspiration from Ignatius Irudayam SJ, is involved in the formation of competent personnel to carry out dialogue at the grass roots level.

The Vision of Ignatius Irudayam

Most of my reflections are based on the life and practice of Fr.Ignatius Irudayam SJ in the service of inter-religious dialogue. To some extent they are also based on my life and practice in the same field. Fr.Ignatius Irudayam was a pioneer of dialogue in the Indian Church for over 25 years. He was the founder of Aikya Alayam (Temple of Unity) in Chennai. Aikya Alayam was inaugurated on 8-9-1974 by Archbishop Arulappa of Madras-Mylapore. Fr.Ignatius Irudayam dedicated himself and tirelessly worked for the cause of inter-religious harmony till his death on 25th March 1995.

Fr.Ignatius Irudayam could very well integrate dialogue with spiritual experience and theological reflection. Prof. Ewert H.Cousins of Fordham University in his article, "Global Spirituality - Transformation of Consciousness on the eve of 21st Century", writes:

"As we stand on the eve of the 21st century, we can discern throughout the world many crises, cross-currents, and positive developments. Perhaps the most striking development in the field of religions is the emergence of inter-religious dialogue during the past century, reaching impressive proportions over the last several decades. In this field Father Ignatius Irudayam has been a pioneer. His development of Aikya Alayam is not only a major achievement in itself, but it also symbolizes in a concrete fashion the highest ideals of inter-religious dialogue. Through his life and his work, he has led the way into the

future. For he has grounded dialogue in deep spiritual experience and at the same time espoused the ideals of intellectual research. It is the blending of these two elements that stands as a model- a signpost giving to others direction and inspiration toward the further development of inter-religious dialogue in the 21st century”.

Fr. Ignatius Irudayam himself clarifies his understanding of dialogue in an article: “The foundation and origin of all spoken dialogue is the inner silent dialogue of contemplation. This requires not only an academic study of various religions, but also the inner experience of their spiritual wealth, along with the experience of one’s own faith. While being faithful to one’s own faith, it gives the dialoguers the profound and global intuition of God’s own plan for the salvation of all his creatures. The inner dialogue and contemplation is best achieved in the ancient Indian tradition of Ashram life. This ashram life has come to occupy a rightful place in Christian and Catholic spiritual life. This therefore, forms both the source and crown of dialogue pilgrimage.”

I myself have seen Fr. Ignatius Irudayam in deep silent contemplation in the sanctuary of Aikya Alayam. Contemplation gave him the strength and clarity of vision to dedicate himself to the service of dialogue till the end of his life.

Fr. Ignatius Irudayam was very careful in choosing his partners of dialogue. He insisted that his partners in dialogue should be knowledgeable in their religions and actually practise them. He says: “Among the Hindus those who were professionally engaged in cultic practices were not sufficiently knowledgeable about the meaning of what they did to be invited for fruitful dialogue. Some scholars would not be really committed to their beliefs although they wrote books and made money. In between these, there are learned lay-scholars who are knowledgeable and committed to their religious life, and quite capable of giving an account of their beliefs. Among these we invited some of this third class, to share their experiences in subjects in which we had trained our Catholic partners.”

With dialogue partners of this third kind, Fr. Ignatius Irudayam conducted several dialogue meetings month after month. Diverse themes

were taken up for dialogue: Prayer and penance, experience of God, *saranagati*, sin, salvation and service to neighbour, religions for peace, *ahimsa*, death, grace, sacraments, etc. There was a simultaneous study of the Saivite text *Thiruvasagam* and St. John's Gospel for several meetings. Universal symbols of world religions like fire, ash, water, spirit, meal, etc. were subjects on which participants shared their thoughts and experiences.

Along with the variety of subjects and themes, Aikya Alayam under the guidance of Fr. Ignatius Irudayam was growing in the spirit of inter-faith dialogue and harmony. Along with the monthly dialogue meetings there were inter-faith live together programmes, inter-faith pilgrimages and inter-faith fasts. Thrice a year there was inter-faith live together in Aikya Alayam. The dialogue partners came in the evening to Aikya Alayam for the purpose of inter-faith live together, and left the following evening. During this time they meditated together, ate together and had spiritual sharing sessions (*sat-sangs*). Once a year the dialogue partners went on an inter-faith pilgrimage. They visited Saivaite and Vaishnavite temples, Moslim Mosques and Christian churches. They were received by the religious authorities with honour and respect. They sat-together and prayed together; it was a moving sight. Once a year during the season of Lent the dialogue partners of Aikya Alayam observed a day of fast together. They made a voluntary contribution that was sent for the Campaign against Hunger and Disease.

Special mention should be made of the annual celebration of the triple festivals of lights in Aikya Alayam. Deepavali is the festival of light for the Hindus in general; Thiru Karthigai is the festival of light of the Saivaites; Christmas is the festival of light of the Christians. These three festivals of light were celebrated together in the month of December. Bhajans invoking the God of Light were sung, excerpts from various religious Scriptures depicting God as Light were read, special messages from leaders of these religions were given, and common prayers were recited, e.g., St. Francis Assisi's prayer for peace.

People point out that in the principles and practices of inter-faith dialogue of Fr. Ignatius Irudayam the social dimension was lacking. Before he dedicated himself totally for the service of dialogue in the last 25 years

of his life, he was a zealous social worker. Even while he was at Aikya Alayam he was spiritually guiding those involved in social apostolate; he was also helping and training people who would entirely dedicate themselves for liberative work. In social work Fr. Ignatius Irudayam emphasised the role of contemplation. He wrote three volumes in Tamil, his *Opus Magnum*, Spirituality—Christian and Indian. The third volume is on ashrams. In Chapter 10, section 2 of this volume, he has set apart about 30 pages (Pages 292-324) to explain in detail how contemplation is the root and foundation of liberative service.

Formation for a Culture of Dialogue

When I took charge as the secretary of the Commission for dialogue in the Catholic diocese of Kottar in Tamilnadu, I felt the need of integrating the social dimension in the service of Dialogue. I happened to come across the “Earth Charter”, which was the product of a decade long, world wide, cross-cultural conversation about common goals and shared values. The drafting of the Earth Charter has involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with an inter-national document. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from all regions of the world, different cultures and diverse sectors of society have participated. The Charter has been shaped by both experts and representatives of grass root communities. It is a people’s treaty that sets forth an important expression of the hopes and aspirations of the emerging global civil society. A new phase in the Initiative began with the official launching of the Earth Charter at the Peace Palace in the Hague on June 29, 2000. The mission of the Initiative is to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for Nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace. I have integrated the objects of the Earth Charter in my dialogue meetings. I speak of the Earth Charter and its objectives whenever there is a chance of proclaiming it in public forums.

I am more and more convinced of the need of forming people in general, irrespective of caste, creed, language and religion, in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue and harmony at the grass roots level. For this purpose I have chosen 60 topics. These topics include saints of various

religious traditions, their sacred books, their religious and doctrinal syntheses, feasts, fasts, etc. These topics also include various aspects of dialogue and the social dimensions proposed by the Earth Charter. The final topic is a theology of inter-religious dialogue. I have begun to train leaders who will form people in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue and harmony using these topics at the grass-root level.

In the civil district of Kanyakumari and in the ecclesiastical diocese of Kottar there are more than 2000 Basic Christian Communities and there are more than 7000 Basic Human Communities. The communities cover all the people of the district. Now there are 20 full time workers for these Basic Christian Communities, and 70 full time workers for the Basic Human Communities. If the full time workers are instructed and formed in these 60 topics they will take the message of the inter-faith dialogue and harmony to the people at the grass-root level. This formation project has started.

I am trying to make use of Sundays to promote the ideals of inter-religious dialogue and harmony among Catholics. With the permission of the authorities, I choose a certain Sunday in a parish. This Sunday will be the Sunday of inter-religious dialogue. The readings, homily, hymns, prayers etc. will revolve around the theme of inter-faith dialogue. From 10 am to 12 am I conduct a seminar on *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II's decree on relationship of the Church with non-Christian religions. People respond well.

I am also preparing a handbook on inter-faith dialogue and harmony for the use of Christians as well as people of other religions. In this I am trying to propose objectively, truthfully and sincerely the information that I have gathered for the 60 topics mentioned above. Whatever promotes unity among peoples and religions will be integrated and whatever is divisive will be put aside. It would be a sort of manual for the full timers in Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities that I have mentioned above.

I am full of hope and optimism with regard to the spread of the ideals of inter-religious dialogue and harmony in the years to come. When we were young we have planted, watered and tendered with care saplings of trees. After forty or fifty years these saplings have

grown into tall and thick trees. The seeds of inter-faith dialogue and harmony sown by many and the toil and work of thousands of men and women in this service will surely bring forth a good harvest, for this is the work of the divine Spirit 'that blows where it wills'.

Thozhimai Illam
Kovalam - 629702
Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu

Making Harmony in the Land of the Buddha

Thomas Chillikulam

Harmony - Inter-religious Forum, Patna, tries to reach out to followers of different religions by fostering friendship and getting involved in educational, social and ecological concerns with them.

Bihar, the Seedbed of Religions

As I began the work of inter-faith dialogue in Bihar some years ago, I was deeply aware of two evidently paradoxical realities here. On the one hand, there exists a rich and long history of religions, religious pluralism and dialogue in this land of the *Viharas*. Gautama became Buddha and preached his *Dhamma* here. It is here that Mahavira, the great Tirthankara of Jainism, was born and attained his nirvana. Patna, the present capital city of Bihar, known as Pataliputra in ancient times, was the capital of Ashoka the Great whose pillar-inscriptions, dating back to 3rd century B.C.E, reveal his vision of a multi-religious and harmonious society. Patna witnessed the birth of the great Sikh saint and religious leader Guru Gobind Singh. Not far from Patna is the *dargah* of Maneri, the great and revered Sufi saint.

On the other hand, in spite of its great religio-cultural heritage, Bihar today presents a bleak picture of being a poverty-ridden, corrupt and the least developed state of India. It indeed is paradoxical that a great religious tradition, utter poverty and corruption could co-exist so unscrupulously. Some of my friends in Patna and I were convinced that religions share a collective responsibility for such a situation. We also felt that this was the challenge as well as our responsibility to bring religions together and engage them to work unitedly for a better Bihar.

As a student and later as a teacher of Indian religions as well as of Christian theology, I was able to delve into the spiritual resources of all the major world religions. The opportunity I had to write a thesis on theology of religions under the direction of Dr. Francis Clooney SJ of Boston College, a reputed theologian of comparative religions, helped me to enter with greater confidence into the ministry of dialogue. The fact that the first Jesuit missionaries who came to Patna in 1620 were involved in dialogue at the court of Makhdum Khan, the Mughal governor, motivated my option for the dialogue ministry. 'Harmony' Inter-Faith Forum, Patna was an outcome of all the above factors.

'Harmony' Inter-Faith Forum sees itself as a movement to promote unity and fellowship between followers of different religions so that all may work together towards the creation of a harmonious and just society in Bihar. The first step towards this vision is to promote better relationship and understanding between people of different religions by minimizing misunderstandings, wrong notions and stereotyping of one community by the other, and secondly by sharing the rich religious values and experiences of all religions. However, the Forum believes that building a better relationship is not the final end of dialogue but only a step towards a process of collective action to remove poverty, injustice and such evil in society, and thereby create true harmony.

Celebrating Festivals in the 'other's Courtyard'

Common celebration of festivals are usually held in a common place acceptable to people of all religions. The Forum wanted to celebrate such festivals in different ways and venues. Accordingly,

in 2006 'Holi', the Hindu festival of colours, was celebrated in the campus of a mosque in the thickly populated and mostly Muslim area in the outskirts of Patna. The highlight of the programme was the singing of the traditional Holi songs written by a Muslim Sufi poet Amir Khusro. This inter-faith Holi celebration was unique in that there was no traditional sprinkling of colors. The head of the mosque Shah Shamimuddin Munemi said on the occasion: "We need no other colours but the colour of love"! In 2007 the same event was held in a Christian milieu and it evoked the same response. Combined celebration of festivals has been another way the Forum strives to engage people of all religions. Four festivals related to four major religions - Baisakhi, Ram Navami, Id-e-Milad and Easter - were jointly celebrated, with recitation of hymns, prayers and discussion on the significance of these festivals. Such occasions, as one of the participants Md. Ethesham commented, help us to "put away the scissors that cut and take up needles that knit", and to deepen the bond with our religious neighbours.

Common celebration of the feasts of saints from different religions and reflection on the lives of these saints have been enriching experiences. In one such celebration organized by the Forum, saints from Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism were remembered and celebrated. The participants from different religions felt that saints and holy persons from all religions, belong to all and an experience of the communion of these saints would help establish communion between people of different religions.

Children Become Agents of Harmony

Children by their very nature are not communal. In order that their innocent minds are not vitiated by the prejudiced views of the elders, the Forum initiated the establishment of units in the schools to conscientize the children and get them involved in our action for harmony. The response has been very encouraging. For example, in an inter-school cultural programme on the theme of harmony, children from 15 schools put up various programmes highlighting communal harmony. The programmes, some of the teachers told me, evolved mainly from the creativity and awareness of the children themselves. Dialogue with children has been one of my enriching experiences. To my question, what can you do to prevent people of two religions

fight, a little girl told me: “when daddy and mummy fight, I stop them; I will try to stop others too!”

There is no better way of dialogue than building warm personal relationships with people of other religions. Fr. Paul Jackson S.J., a well known scholar of Islam, who has been doing research on the Sufi saint Maneri's Writings speaks of his dialogue experience: “I spend most of my time in the Khuda Baksh library, Patna, translating Maneri's works from Persian to English. But, first and foremost, my experience of Islam comes from the personal love relationship I have established with many Muslim families and friends.” My own experience of visiting friends from other religions in their homes, inviting them to my home and especially eating meals with them have been profound and heart-warming .

Concern for the Environment and for Social Justice

‘Tarumitra’ (Friends of Trees) an ecological movement for children initiated by Jesuit priest Robert Athickal in Patna attempts to make environmental protection an inter-religious affair. In his Eco-camps, he makes the students aware of the ecological concern inherent in various religious texts and traditions. “There is, perhaps, no better way of making the children understand the goodness of Mother Earth than making them listen to the *Bhumi Sukta* from the Atharva Veda”, says Robert.

Fr. Philip Manthara, a veteran Jesuit social activist for more than three decades, harmonizes social action and inter-religious dialogue by joining forces with various movements that work for communal harmony. Fr. Manthara, a regular participant in all the activities of ‘Harmony’ Inter-Faith Forum, feels that religions must make use of the spiritual potential inherent in them to effectively and positively transform society. ‘Jeevan Samgha’, a Jesuit centre in Bodh Gaya functions both as a social centre and a centre for dialogue. Fr. Sumit Edwin Menezes, a dedicated social worker, founded Inter-Faith Forum, Bodh Gaya and initiated dialogue with the Buddhist monks of Bodh Gaya. Presently the centre at Bodh Gaya conducts regular prayer meetings involving people of all religions.

Open Theological Perspectives

Experiences of entry into the spiritual horizons of the followers of other religions over the years have helped me gain a deeper understanding of the Divine. In one of my friendly visits to a Muslim cleric, I was invited to join him and the others in the *Namaz*. Initially I stood behind the lines of worshippers watching the prayer, with an obviously awkward feeling. As the prayer progressed I could not resist an inner urge to join the prayer. The moment was so profound and overwhelming that the Muslim profession of faith, “there is no God but Allah” and the Biblical imperative “You shall have no other gods” (Ex.20:3) seemed to say not just the same truth but something much deeper. The Allah of Islam was no more the “other” God but the same Father (Abba) whom Jesus revealed, and the same divinity spoken of in the Upanishads as *satyam jnanam anantam* (Tait. Up.11.i.1). Partaking in the God experience of the followers of different religions takes us a step closer to the realization of the inexhaustibility of the mystery that the Divine is, as well as the limitlessness and universality of His love. The same divine hand that reaches out to me, reaches out to the whole of humanity. To use an analogy, when I shake hands, my touch is felt not just by the hand of the other, but by the whole person. Likewise, God’s reaching out to me can be seen not as an annulment of his revelation to others, but as a sign and proof that God is doing the same to the whole of humanity.

As I developed a personal relationship with people of other religions, I realized that I am not looking at them anymore as Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus but as friends and as humans. Jesus in his earthly life, transcended all such cultural, social and religious confines. What mattered to him was the suffering of the Canaanite woman and not what race she belonged to (Mt. 15: 21-28). For Jesus, it did not matter whether the woman at the well of Sychar was a Samaritan or Jew or whether Jerusalem was superior to Mount Gerizim, but he was concerned about quenching her thirst for the “living water” (Jn.4: 7-15). The commitment to human well-being transcends all theological differences (Mt.25:31-40). Personal relationships can diminish the gap created by doctrinal differences. Moreover, only friends can see the position of the other better.

In all my efforts to establish harmony I see myself as a partaker in the dialogue of God with humanity, and this dialogue must be the pattern of my dialogue. God's dialogue with humanity, beginning with creation, is an act of self-giving love. He gifts us with will, reason and freedom, and the capacity to love. He does not speak to us from a higher plane of authority and arrogance, but as *Abba* who loves, a good shepherd who cares. The Word became flesh and "emptied" himself to identify with our humanity. Inter-religious dialogue, in its true sense, requires such an identification with the humanity of the other, in and through which the divine mystery continues to reveal Itself.

Harmony- Inter-faith Forum,
Regional Theology Centre, Danapur Cantt.
Patna 801503, Bihar.

Dialogue Promoting Good Neighbourly Relations

Mary John Kattikatt

Ishalaya (Palamaner, AP) with its ashram base promotes dialogue of life with good neighbourly contacts with followers of different religions.

My Inter-faith Journey

Ever since the II. Vatican Council, our Congregation, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, especially the Chennai Province, has been making serious efforts to implement the recommendations of the Council. Inter-faith dialogue and inculturation have received considerable attention in this process. Sisters were introduced into them through study of the Vatican II documents, seminars, lectures and lived experiences. Apart from the common preparations, I was fortunate to have university studies which gave me an added

enthusiasm to be in the dialogue ministry. I have a Master's Degree in History with special emphasis on Indian History and Culture. For my doctoral research I chose an inter-disciplinary topic combining Indian History and Indian Philosophy. The title of my thesis is: "The Growth and Development of Visishtadvaita and Shaiva-Siddhanta in Chola Empire". It opened up before me immense opportunities to study Hinduism and other religions. Academic studies were supplemented with experiences in collaborating with other agencies/institutions engaged in inter-faith dialogue, especially Gandhi Peace Foundation, Satyanilayam, Aikya Aleyam, Institute of Development Education – all based in Chennai. After some years of preparation Ishalaya, the Franciscan ashram was started in June 1986. I was the director(superior) of Ishalaya from 1986 to 1994 and from 2000 to 2007 June. The experiences I relate below come from the combined efforts of the community of Ishalaya.

From 1986 to 2000 Ishalaya ashram was in Chennai, about 10 km away from Stella Maris College, where I was a member on the Faculty of the History Department till 1998.

Exploring Contacts

While teaching I had occasions to present papers and participate in the programmes organised by the above mentioned agencies/institutions. As a Faculty member and Head of the department of History, I was able to introduce papers such as "Introduction to Indian Philosophy", "Performing Arts and Culture" and "Modern Indian Thinkers", in view of widening the mental horizons of students so as to help them appreciate the different religio-philosophical systems and the culture of our great country. In 1993 the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago highlighted especially two events of importance – the inter-faith pilgrimage of Christians, Hindus and Muslims to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari and the public Inter-faith meeting in which eminent persons from Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism participated with their speeches, songs, prayers etc.

In Ishalaya we had a study circle which met every week for eight years. Participants were Christians, Hindus and occasionally Muslims. It was a mixed group of students, teachers, housewives, sisters and

priests. Study mainly consisted of Tirukkural (a Tamil religious classic) and also a comparative study of sannyasa, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. In connection with the study of sannyasa in Jainism we had an enriching encounter with two Jain nuns who had come from Bombay to spend a few days with their family in Mylapore, Chennai. They shared with us their motivation for taking to sannyasa, their ascetical practices, their method of meditation and their way of life. Carnatic Music is an effective means of contact with people of other religions. Sr. Esther Rani, a member of our community and an accomplished Carnatic musician has wide range contacts especially with Hindus. She is invited to sing on various occasions in churches, temples, at public meetings, on All India Radio and occasionally on Television.

Ashram-based Dialogue

In the year 2000 Ishalaya ashram was shifted to Palamaner, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, its present venue. The new beginning gave a fresh impetus in living dialogue and also in formulating our vision. We realized that after the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who entered into relationship with various types of people, with all creatures and with the whole cosmos, we too need to have a broad vision. Dialogue of life enhances the inter-faith encounters. Living in harmony with all creatures, with nature and with the whole cosmos is part of dialogue in its broad sense. This vision got crystallized on canvas: a painting, 3.5'x2', of Cosmic Fraternity, displayed in the dining room of the ashram is a constant reminder to us of this vision of inter-faith harmony. The following steps are taken to translate this vision into life.

1. Entering into the life-texture of the local people by appreciating and adopting their meaningful customs and usages in music, art and way of worship by taking aarati, making floral designs as decorations for celebrations and using Indian music especially bhajans for liturgy.

2. Integrating the liberating aspects from the spirituality of other religions into our life and prayer by practicing yoga asanas, dhyana, pranayama etc., and the use of texts from other Scriptures for study and prayer; by practicing ahimsa (non-violence) and mindfulness, values special to Jainism and Buddhism respectively.

3. In view of building up a harmonious local community, we have been visiting families in the neighbourhood. Majority of them are Hindus and Muslims. It was a rewarding experience because we saw that people who appeared to be suspicious and indifferent at the beginning turned out to be friends and partners in dialogue. Children were our starting point. They used to come to our ashram to play, to drink water, to visit the crib in Christmas season etc. Slowly we got a small library with children's books which they started reading. They began to sing and dance on festive occasions. Through the children we became acquainted with the parents and other elders of the family. Children along with the parents began to come just to sit around to enjoy the peace and quietness of the ashram, or to pray in the mandir (chapel); sometimes they joined us in our prayers. Visits to the families in the locality are a regular programme of our community. We visit them especially on occasions of birth, death, sickness and local feasts.

Friendly visits and individual contacts eventually helped us to form an inter-faith dialogue group in the year 2000. Since then meetings are held every first Sunday of the month. To begin with, we reflected on human values like justice, peace, freedom and love. After two years we had an evaluation, and suggestions were invited from the group. Accordingly, now each religion takes turn to present a selected text from its Scripture with life-oriented explanations and illustrations. Participation of the group is ensured by singing, sometimes by individuals, sometimes by small groups and sometimes by the whole group. After the main speaker finishes, those who wish to share on the same theme do so briefly. This is followed by silent meditation to interiorize what was spoken / heard. The meeting is concluded by reciting together the prayer of St. Francis for peace.

Working towards Communal Harmony

Two of the action-oriented involvements of our dialogue group were: one, an exhibition entitled 'Precious Me in a Precious World', highlighting the uniqueness of the human person, the need for justice and peace and the means of maintaining ecological balance; two, a signature campaign and a letter to the UN Secretary General to end the war in Iraq.

One of the perceived impacts of the meeting, to be noted, is that a serious conflict between Muslims and Christians was averted.

Some people of a fanatical Christian sect distributed Christian pamphlets in front of a mosque when the Muslim community was coming out of prayer. This offended their religious sentiments; they considered it as an attempt to convert them to Christianity. Muslims retaliated by beating up the Pastor. However, further violence was stopped by the intervention of a respected Muslim gentleman who is a member of our dialogue group and who appreciates our efforts to build up harmony in the locality.

Involvement in dialogue has been a liberating experience. It has helped me to see things from a broad perspective, to see that all peoples of the world, no matter to which religion they belong, are children of the same God, our Father-Mother, and also brothers and sisters to one another. The same God creates, sustains and saves the entire cosmos through different channels perceived by diverse religions. The Kingdom of God is greater than any organized religion. Kingdom values are also human values. They form the common platform which unites us as one. As part of this planet we have close affinity with all creatures, with nature and the entire cosmos. We belong to the cosmic fraternity, the earth family, with privileges and responsibilities. Dialogue teaches us that we have the same origin and same destiny. Whichever way we follow to reach that divine destiny we need to see all peoples as co-pilgrims. Therefore the mission of the Church is to have an all-inclusive attitude and to seek to enter into communion with all. The Church needs to promote life-affirming values wherever they are found. At the same time we need to be rooted in our own religion. Dialogue must help Christians to be fully Christians, Muslims to be fully Muslims, Hindus to fully Hindus. The Church should be less pre-occupied with having an increase in numbers. Our presence in India is to be above all a witness to living the values of Christ fully rooted in the culture of our country.

Ishalaya

Gandhinagar

Palamaner - 517408

Chittoor Dt., AP

Dialogue for Creating a New Mind-set

James Gurudas Naduvilekut

Snehavani, Thellakom, Kerala, has an active inter-religious Fellowship that meets every month with programmes of inter-religious dialogue.

Snehavani

Snehavani is a Centre for Inter-religious Fellowship started at the initiative of Fr. James Gurudas Naduvilekut of the Kottayam Province of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) Congregation. Although the activities of Snehavani had started on 28 March 1999, the formal inauguration of an Inter-religious Fellowship consisting of members belonging to Christianity, Hinduism and Islam was on January 1, 2000. This Fellowship has two wings: the 'Snehavani Universal Fellowship' (SUF) and 'Snehavani Youth Fellowship' (SYF). On 14th March 2006 thirty two youth belonging to Christianity, Hinduism and Islam took oath before the renowned singer Padmabhushan Dr. K.J. Yesudas and received SYF badge from him.

Inter-religious Fellowship

Regular meetings of Snehavani Universal Fellowship are held at 10 a.m. on the first of every month. After a prayer song a passage each from the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita and the Quran is read by three members. A long talk by an eminent scholar is the main item of this meeting. It is followed by discussion and sharing by members of SUF. The theme of the talks and discussions are such as to be helpful to remove prejudices and misunderstandings between religions, mutual sharing of religious ideas and ideals and bringing about harmony between religions and between science and religion. More than hundred scholars and literary persons have given talks at SUF meetings so far. Seminars are conducted occasionally on topics like relevance of inter-religious dialogue and entry of non-Hindus in Hindu Temples.

Snehavani Youth Fellowship meets regularly at 11 a. m. on the second Sunday of every month and discusses ways and means to promote the ideal of universal harmony. Both the wings of Snehavani Fellowship together celebrate every year three feasts – Onam, Christmas and Ramsan.

Members of these Fellowships make every year a study tour cum pilgrimage. They visit a church, a temple and a mosque. The pilgrimage is used as an occasion to explain the bonds that unite all religions, especially the similarity between the beliefs and symbols of different religions and their inner meaning. Christians who have never entered a temple because of fears and apprehensions feel liberated after their visit to the temple. They are happy and pleasantly surprised when they come to the realization that one and the same God is adored in different ways in different religions.

One of the most important activities that takes place in Snehavani is the explanation of the symbols in and around the building to the numerous visitors who come either attracted by the news about its activities or recommended by the members of Snehavani Fellowship. The reliefs on the gate, on the outer walls of the building and on the inner walls of the conference hall and class rooms and in a special way the ‘meditation point’ in the prayer room are vibrant with a message of the sublimity of dialogue and universal fellowship. These symbols are meant to conscientise people about the value and importance of inter-religious harmony and universal communion.

Snehavani is publishing a Malayalam Quarterly named *Snehavani* from the beginning of 2000 with a view to promoting inter-religious dialogue and universal fellowship.

Jesus Christ and Religions

I am impressed to see how much Hindus really love and respect Jesus as a God, however not as *the* God. Christians who are still under the effect of hellenization of biblical kerygma should be ready to accept this belief, because it has strong basis in the New Testament Writings. NT authors make a distinction between *theos* (God) and *ho theos* (the God). What is used in relation to Jesus is *theos* and not *ho theos*. If the Church recognizes this fact, which is evidenced

by Karl Rahner in his article *Theos in the New Testament*, *Theological Investigations* Vol. I, it will be tantamount to demolishing a huge hindrance on the path of dialogue with the Hindu intellectuals. It will also facilitate dialogue with the Muslims who hold Jesus as a great prophet. Hindus and Muslims feel that Christians equate Jesus with Brahman or Allah.

Christians should keep in mind that Jesus' absoluteness is relative absoluteness: he is absolute saviour for his disciples just as Buddha is absolute saviour for his disciples. It would be quite relevant and useful to compare religion with one's own mother. My mother is unique to me. I was born from her; therefore she is objectively unique to me. She loves me and I love her since my birth; therefore she is subjectively unique to me. So it is in our relation to our religion of upbringing.

Mission of the Church should be limited to inculcating the Spirit of Jesus into all cultures. Biblically Spirit means power, i.e., the inner power which propelled Jesus towards God and fellow humans. This inner power was nothing but his Abba-consciousness, the conviction and faith, that God is his Father and of all. It was this Spirit, inner power, which moved him vertically and horizontally and enabled him to break his self for the liberation and salvation of his fellow humans.

Snehavani
Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue
Thellakom - 686016, Kerala

The Story of an Axiom

.Julian Saldanha

I. Posing the question

The teaching of the Church (popes and councils) is distinguished into two categories: ordinary and extraordinary magisterium. The extraordinary magisterium is understood to be infallible and is subject to stringent conditions, such as those described in the definition of papal infallibility (ND 839) and in Canon 749, especially § 3: "No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless this is manifestly demonstrated." It is beyond the purview of this article to discuss the 'creeping infallibility' which, during the last two decades, has tried to expand the scope of infallible teachings, not without some confusion¹. The vast majority of the Church's teaching belongs to the ordinary magisterium, which could presumably sometimes be erroneous. To hold that there cannot be any erroneous teaching in the ordinary magisterium, would be to delete the above distinction which the magisterium itself makes between the forms of its teaching. Therefore, it would be strange if in the last two millennia there has not been a single error in the ordinary magisterium. However, no such error seems to have been admitted by the magisterium. Many expected pope John Paul II to do this, in connection with the famous Galileo case. This does not appear in his Allocution (31/10/1992) to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences studying the judgment passed on the doctrines of Galileo². "In this Allocution he blamed the "theologians"; not once is the then Pope or H. Office, which condemned Galileo, mentioned. He stated that if Galileo refused to present the system of Copernicus as an hypothesis, the theologians failed to question their criteria of interpreting Scripture.

1. See articles in: *America*, 1-8-1998, pp 8-12, *The Tablet*, 11-7-1998, pp 895, 900, 916

2. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 85, N.9 (9-9-1993), pp 764-772

On 12 March 2000 pope John Paul II led officials of the Roman Curia in confessing some of the public sins of the Church of the past and present. Among them: a) sins of intolerance and violence against dissidents, Crusades, Inquisition, etc.; b) persecutions of other churches; c) sins against Jews; d) sins against other cultures and religions; e) sins against human rights and social justice. The previous year, the International Theological Commission had noted: "Indeed in the entire history of the Church there are no precedents for requests for forgiveness by the magisterium for past wrongs"³, at least till Vatican II (UR 7). All this concerns *sins* of the past. It would help to clear the air if the magisterium were also to acknowledge errors in some past *teachings*. This would likewise be an unprecedented step in the entire history of the Church.

In this article I wish to single out one such teaching, which was once axiomatic: "Outside the Church no salvation" ('extra Ecclesiam nulla salus'). There are a number of theologians who fight shy of qualifying this teaching as erroneous, partly because of its prestigious pedigree (having been taught by seven popes and three general councils over a period of more than six centuries), and partly because they probably think it to be an infallible teaching. With George Tavard (Sullivan: 66), I disagree with the view of Denzinger (introduction to DS 870) that this teaching is a "dogmatic definition" in the sense that this word has today. F. Sullivan refrains from expressing any opinion on the issue. Even when the Holy Office, in its Letter of 8/8/1949 to the archbishop of Boston, referred to it as an "infallible dictum ... that the Church has always taught and will always teach" (ND 854), it understood the dictum in the revised and qualified sense as explained in the same letter. This letter censured Fr. Leonard Feeney and his followers for holding this axiom in its narrow sense. Nevertheless, writing in the aftermath of Vatican II, the Catholic intellectual Frank Sheed (166) felt that, like the 'Modernists' before Feeney, "he was condemned but not answered". He had only stated "what a vast number of yesterday's Catholics had grown up believing. Everybody would have been helped by a full-length discussion". Such a discussion

3. *Memory and Reconciliation*, No. 1.1 (CBCI, 2000)

“might have diminished the violence of the explosion we are still living through, might even have prevented the explosion”. In fact the late archbishop Lefebvre, and the Society of St Pius X which he founded, insist on the (past) teaching of the magisterium, from which they are convinced that Vatican II and the popes (beginning with John XXIII) have departed. He felt that the council had adopted the principles of the French Revolution (1789): liberty, equality, fraternity. Congar (1977) admits that this council’s “Declaration on Religious Freedom” affirmed the exact opposite of Pius IX’s “Syllabus” of Errors (ND 1013).

One person who has recently attempted the type of discussion called for by Sheed, is Francis Sullivan, in his book *Salvation Outside the Church*?⁴ After presenting the historical data, I shall weigh the arguments which he forwards to support the view that our axiom was always taught by the magisterium in the correct sense. My focus is on the official teaching of popes and councils, with minimal references to theologians by way of background.

2. The historical itinerary

2.1. Theological background

In a homily. Origen (ca. 185-254) referred to the house of Rahab and originated the saying, “outside the church, no one is saved”. But his contemporary St Cyprian (ca. 200-258) used it with much frequency. Yet both of them directed their speech to those Christians who they felt were *culpably* closing their eyes to the truth, so that they committed the grave sins of heresy and/or schism (Sullivan: 20-27). They probably never had in mind the descendants of such heretics/schismatics who might be brought up in good faith. Once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, Cyprian’s axiom began to be used in a more rigorous sense. St Augustine’s (354-430) position was, that those who lived after the coming of Christ and who have never heard the Gospel, belong to “that mass which will certainly be damned” (“A Treatise ...”: 476). How literally he understood his words may be gauged from his effort to salvage children from such a terrible fate: he said that in hell they would only suffer “the mildest

4. The International Theological Commission (1996) treats of the history of the axiom. only from the time of Pius XII

punishment of all” (“Enchiridion”). The Provincial council of Carthage (418), held during his life-time, taught that due to original sin, infants who die without baptism, go to hell as “partners of the devil”. Accordingly the council anathematized anyone who holds that there will be “a middle place somewhere” where such blessed infants will live (DS 223-’4). Later, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and Peter Lombard (1158) would hold, that infants dying without baptism would suffer the privation of the beatific vision (Sullivan: 46). And in 1794 Pius VI defended such an “intermediary place and state which the faithful generally call ‘the limbo of children’ ” (DS 2626). Bp Fulgentius of Ruspe, an avid follower of Augustine, even stated that God “did not wish to save those to whom he denied the knowledge of the saving mystery” (Sullivan: 42). This is a point which would be developed, to chilling effect, by John Calvin (1509-1564) in his doctrine of predestination.

2.2. Popes and General Councils

In a Letter to archbishop Humbert in 1201, *Innocent III* affirmed that “the punishment of original sin is the privation of the vision of God, the punishment of actual sin is the perpetual suffering of hell” (DS 780). Furthermore in 1208 he required the Waldensians to profess that outside the Roman Catholic Church “no one is saved” (DS 792).

With the same pope presiding, the general council of *Lateran IV* (1215) stated: “There is one universal Church of the faithful outside which no one *at all* is saved ...(emphasis added: ND 21). To be noted is the fact that this statement is placed in the context of *core truths* of Christian faith: Trinity, Christology, Ecclesiology.

Clement IV, in 1267, composed a profession of faith, which was repeated in the “Profession of Faith of Michael Palaeologus”. This was read out at the general council of Lyons II (1274). though not discussed. The Profession avowed that those in mortal or original sin go to hell, “to be punished with different punishments” (ND 26, DS 858).

Well known is the Bull of *Boniface VIII* “Unam Sanctam” of 1302. The opening sentence asserts that there is one catholic Church, “outside of whom there is neither salvation nor remission of sins”. It

concludes with the declaration: 'Furthermore we declare, state and define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all human beings that they submit to the Roman Pontiff' (ND 804). Two centuries later the general council of *Lateran V* (session II: 1516) confirmed: "We renew and give our approval to that Constitution" of Boniface of VIII (Tanner: 644).

Clement VI (1351), in his Letter "Super Quibusdam" included in the Profession of Faith to be made by the Armenian Church: that "no person on this earth can eventually be saved outside the faith of this (Roman) Church and the obedience of the Roman Pontiffs" (DS 1051).

The *Council of Florence* (1442) continued this teaching, spelling out in greater detail those to whom it applied: The holy Roman Church: "firmly believes, professes and preaches that no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life: but they will go to the 'eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt 25:41), unless before the end of their life they are joined to it" (ND 810).

Pius IV (1564), on the recommendation of the council of Trent, prepared a profession of faith to be made by all prelates in the Church. It's concluding paragraph began: "This true Catholic faith, outside of which no one can be saved. ..." (ND 38). The council of Trent (1545-1563) did not discuss the question of the salvation of non-Christians, because this was not in dispute with the Reformers. The council stressed the importance, for salvation, of faith and baptism, at least of wish ("voto") (ND 1928, 1935): but this new qualification was not incorporated by Pius IV in his profession of faith.

Benedict XIV (1743) required the new Maronite Patriarch to make a profession of faith affirming, "This faith of the Catholic Church outside of which no one can be saved" (DS 2540).

Pius VIII (1830) in his Brief on mixed marriages "Litteris Altero Abhinc" speaks of "that most steadfast dogma of our religion, that outside the Catholic faith nobody can be saved" (Bermejo: 237).

Views of this type probably contributed their part in justifying various forms of coercion or violence against non-Christians (Sullivan. 69). He (102) summarizes the situation up to the opening of the 19th century:

"There was no doubt about the fact that 'No salvation outside the Church' was still the official doctrine. The decrees of the medieval popes and councils to that effect had never been repealed." In other words, the axiom was understood by the magisterium literally in a rigoristic, narrow and exclusivist sense. That this was indeed the understanding of the magisterium is confirmed by the views expressed by most missionaries. To cite a few examples (Saldanha: 43), Francis Xavier's indulgenced prayer for the conversion of infidels exclaims: "Behold, Lord, to your dishonour hell is being filled with them !" From India he writes to St Ignatius Loyola: "I have very often had the notion to go round the universities of Europe. and especially Paris, and to shout aloud everywhere like a madman ... 'Alas, what an immense number of souls are excluded from heaven through your fault and thrust down to hell !'" His grand-nephew Jerome Xavier plainly told the Moghul emperor Jehangir and his court that Mohammed was in hell. The three princes in the court whom he baptized affirmed the same and added that the Muslims too would meet the same fate. One of the Friars martyred in Thane in 1321 (near Mumbai) said the same to the Muslims there (Odoric: 82). Some Dominicans in China held the crucifix in their hands and preached publicly, that Confucius and his followers were damned. That this outlook survived quite late may be illustrated from a sermon delivered by Anastasius Hartmann, later bishop of Patna and Bombay, before leaving his home parish in Switzerland in 1841: "If I leave you, it is for this reason alone: to snatch them from eternal destruction by the light and grace of the gospel, and thus to save their souls" (Buhlmann: 106).

A modification of the papal teaching appears for the first time with *Pius IX*. In his Allocution "Singulari Quadam" (1854) he reiterated "as a matter of faith that outside the apostolic Roman Church no one can be saved": but he made an exception for "those who live in *invincible ignorance* of the true religion" (emphasis added: ND 813; 1010). Nevertheless it was an error, he said, on the part of very many Catholics, that they can "at least have good hopes for the eternal salvation of all those who have never been in the true Church of Christ". This point is repeated in the "Syllabus" (1864: DS 2917: ND 1013/17). He explained the above mentioned exception in his

encyclical “Quanto Conficiamur Moerore” (1863) to the Italian bishops: “We all know that those who suffer from invincible ignorance with regard to our holy religion, if they carefully keep the precepts of the natural law which have been written by God in the hearts of all persons, if they are prepared to obey God, and if they lead a virtuous and dutiful life, can, by the power of divine light and grace, attain eternal life” (ND 814). This was an important qualification which, one might say, anticipated the teaching of Vatican II in “Lumen Gentium”, n. 16. The saving clause of Pius IX was repeated by Leo XIII (1896) in his encyclical “Satis Cognitum” and Pius X (1903) in his encyclical “E Supremi” (Bermejo: 239). Pius XII took up the ideas of Pius IX and added the dimension of an ‘unconscious desire’. In his encyclical “Mystici Corporis” (1943) he invites “those who do not belong to the visible structure of the Catholic Church ... to flee from that situation in which they cannot be secure about their salvation ... although they are oriented towards the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by *some unconscious desire and longing*” (emphasis added: DS 3821). The Holy Office (1949), in its letter on the Feeney case, explained this point further: “it is required that one belong to the Church at least in desire and longing ... When one is invincibly ignorant, God also accepts an implicit desire, so called because it is contained in the good disposition of soul by which a person wants his or her will to be conformed to God’s will” (ND 855).

2.3 Theological opinions

The change in the papal teaching, as witnessed in Pius IX, had begun to be prepared by a series of theologians. But it took centuries for these theological opinions to be accepted by the popes and incorporated into their official teaching, which till then was understood in a rigorist, narrow and exclusivist sense: no salvation outside the Catholic Church. *This is confirmed by the fact that theologians began trying to find ways of mitigating its harshness.* We have already seen how Abelard and Peter Lombard proposed that children dying without baptism, would be in hell without suffering torments but only the deprivation of the beatific vision. Some spoke of extraordinary interventions of God. Thus, regarding a person who had heard nothing about Christ. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) held that the truths

necessary for salvation “would be provided to that person by God, either by a preacher of the faith, as in the case of Cornelius, or by a revelation ...” (*In III Sent.*, d. 25, q. 2. a. I, sol. 1. ad I: quoted by Sullivan: 53). The idea of a *special illumination* regarding Christ was also repeated by Francisco de Vitoria, O.P. (1493-1546; Sullivan: 70) and Robert de Nobili S.J. (1577-1656; Arokiasamy: 289). Aquinas had also introduced the concept of *implicit baptism* of desire, through faith in God and charity. Non-Christians (“infideles”) “belong to the Church in potency” only (S.T. III. q. 8, a. 3. ad 1). However he was under a cloud of suspicion for some time. On the third anniversary of his death, the bishop of Paris, followed by the archbishop of Canterbury, condemned 21 of his theses: and in the later Middle Ages many of his positions were attacked. The Dominicans Melchior Cano (1505-1560) and Domingo Soto (1524-1560) held that God would provide the light necessary for an *implicit faith* (“fides confuse”) in Christ (Sullivan: 76). Jesuit Father Francisco Suarez (1548-1619) also speaks of the possibility of implicit faith in Christ and an implicit desire for baptism (Sullivan: 93). By the time of Pius IX, (Giovanni Perrone S.J. (1794-1876) was proposing that only those guilty of *culpable* heresy, schism or unbelief could not be saved (Sullivan: 112). His views are believed to have greatly influenced Pius IX.

3. Vatican II

The popes from the middle of the 19th century prepared the way for the teaching of Vatican II on the salvation of non-Christians: “those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience” (LG 16). Even atheists are included in this possibility: “Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace.” But if Pius XII spoke of “some unconscious desire and longing” for the Church, on the part of non-Christians, Vatican II prefers to say that they “are related (‘ordinantur’) ⁵ in various ways to the People of

5. The word can also mean “set in order towards”

God" (ibid.). There is no more talk of an 'implicit desire' for baptism or the Church. That is replaced by 'ways known to God': "God in ways known to himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him [Hb 11:6] ..." (AG 7). And GS 22: "Since Christ died for all people, and since the ultimate vocation of humans is one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." Thanks to these perspectives, we pray in Eucharist Prayer III: "Welcome into your kingdom ... all who have left this world in your friendship". And Eucharist Prayer IV: "Remember ... all the dead whose faith is known to you alone."

4. Evaluation of the contemporary discussion

4.1. Historical conditioning

The general tendency is to hold, that during the six-century period referred to above, in teaching "Outside the Church there is *no salvation*", the magisterium actually meant that outside the Church there *is salvation*, under certain conditions or qualifications. These qualifications were added at a later date, due to the development of a broader context of faith or human knowledge. This is the position adopted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), in a general discussion of changed dogmatic formulae (ND 160-'1). The reason for this is that the teaching of the magisterium can sometimes "bear traces" of "the changeable conceptions of a given epoch". Consequently "it sometimes happens that a given dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely) and at a later date ... it receives a fuller and more perfect expression". Hence it is the task of theologians to "seek to define exactly the intention of teaching proper to the various formulas", for "it has sometimes happened that in this habitual usage of the Church certain of these formulas gave way to new expressions which, proposed and approved by the Sacred Magisterium, present more clearly or more completely the same meaning".

I submit that this explanation may be applicable to many other Church teachings, but not to the one under consideration here. If I try to fulfil the task demanded by the CDF, namely to "seek to define

exactly the intention of teaching proper” to the axiom ‘Outside the Church no salvation’. I find that for six centuries the magisterium understood it literally, without any saving clause or qualification, expressed or unexpressed. In fact it was clarified with condemnatory statements about those ‘outside’, thus leaving no doubt about the intention of teaching proper. Therefore I cannot agree with the theologians who affirm that those who taught this axiom only wanted to affirm that God has assigned to the Church a necessary role in the divine economy of salvation (Sullivan: 12, 199, 204) or that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, a phrase popularised by Vatican II (Congar, 1969: 59). The way in which the saying began to be understood from the time of Pius IX does not express “the same meaning” intended earlier. To deny this would be tantamount to affirming, for example, the possibility that the papal teaching about women’s ordination (“I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women ...”)(*Pope Speaks*. 321) could one day state the opposite, due to “a broader context of faith or human knowledge”. In other words it is possible that one day some pope, by adding some saving clauses, may declare that the Church does have the authority to confer priestly ordination on women (*Pope Speaks*). In which case, why foreclose responsible discussion of the issue ? And what shall we say about other teachings of the Church ? One would also be in contradiction with Vatican I’s “Constitution on the Catholic Faith” (1870): “that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother Church has once declared, and there must never be a deviation from that meaning on the specious ground and title of a more profound understanding” (ND 136). Likewise Pius X’s “Oath against the Errors of Modernism” (1910): “I therefore entirely reject the heretical theory of the evolution of the dogmas, viz., that they change from one meaning to another, different from the one which the Church previously held” (ND 143/4).

4.2 Geographical conditioning

In this view, the axiom under consideration must be understood within the limited geographical horizon of the time: the magisterium, theologians and Christians would have been only “vaguely aware of a

world beyond the limits of Christendom" (Sullivan: 63, 201). Unfortunately Sullivan does not examine the historical data for making such a claim. The significant impact of the Mongols on Europe is dismissed with a single sentence (55). A brief survey of some important events which took place, not in the Congo. Japan or Ecuador, but in Europe itself and in its very backyard, should make it clear how keenly aware the magisterium and others were of a world beyond the limits of Christendom (Ohm: 66-72). They surely realised the vast multitudes their teaching was sending to hell.

To begin with, king Khushru II of *Persia* made all Christians in his kingdom become Nestorians. Between 614 and 619 he conquered the great and ancient Christian centres of Antioch, Caesarea, Damascus, Alexandria and Jerusalem. In 634 the *Muslim* Arabs were victorious against the Byzantines in Palestine. In the following years they conquered Damascus (635) and Jerusalem (637). It is estimated that about 80.000 Byzantines fell in the decisive battle with the Muslims at Pilla (638). They next proceeded to invade north Africa, another great Christian centre (642); they conquered Carthage in 695. Christianity in north Africa was reduced to miserable remnants. The Moors conquered Spain between 711-720 and ruled the greater part of it for about 770 years; Madrid was lost to the Arabs in 839. They even entered France, but were defeated by Charles Martel in 732, which prevented the spread of Islamic rule to the rest of Europe. The Saracens ruled Sicily from 827 to 1061, during which time Christian life there became almost extinct. In 846 they reached the Tiber: an event which caused great consternation in the whole of Christendom. Al-Hakim destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the early 11th century. The Crusades took place between 1095-1270. Note that all these events took place before the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216: sec. 2.2 above).

Another important chapter, impinging sharply on Europe, is the rise of the *Mongols* (Dawson; Odoric). In 1237 a Dominican brother Julian wrote to the papal legate in Hungary, warning of a serious danger of a Mongol invasion. In previous years he had led two evangelistic missions to the region between the Urals and Kazakhstan

and knew the Mongols as a fierce and powerful people. He said they were marching toward Europe, intending even to conquer Rome. In 1240 they destroyed Kiev, so that by 1241 Christian Russia had become a province of the Mongol Empire. In 1241 they burned Cracow, conquered Hungary and chased king Bela IV up to the boundary of Italy and the Adriatic. Austria was conquered by them in 1242. Baghdad in 1258 and Damascus in 1260. The popes felt constrained to open cultural and diplomatic relations with the Mongols, with the possibility of making an alliance with them against the Muslims. The first mission to the Mongols (1245-'7) was entrusted by pope Innocent IV to John of Plano Carpini OFM. John's report was by far the most widely known of all the early accounts of Mongols. King Louis IX of France sent Andrew of Longjumeau O.P. as his ambassador to the Mongols (1248-1251). In 1274 Abaga, great-grandson of Chingis Khan, sent his envoys to the council of Lyons II (above, sec. 2.2). In 1277 he sent six envoys to England to meet King Edward I. His son, Argun, sent an emissary to Rome in 1287. This mission spent a year in Western Europe visiting Philip IV. Edward I and pope Nicholas IV. In 1294 John of Montecorvino OFM, sent by pope Nicholas IV, arrived in Peking ('Cambalech).

Then we have Niccolo and Maffeo Polo visiting Kublai Khan in 1265 and returning with a letter from him for the pope. They started a second trip in 1271, accompanied by Niccolo's son Marco Polo and carrying the pope's response. Marco Polo's travel account (1295) met with immediate success, with copies circulated by dozens in all of Europe. It "radically altered European understanding of Asia by forcing the West to recognize a superior culture in the East" (Smethurst). Another mission reached Peking in 1308, at the behest of pope Clement V. In 1342 pope Benedict XII sent John of Marignola OFM to Peking. The Franciscan, Odoric of Pordenone completed a round trip, ca. 1314-1330, from Italy through Armenia and Persia. India (Thane and the south), Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Peking. The reports of all these travellers became remarkably popular in Europe. Immediately after his death (1331) Odoric's account was translated from Latin into French twice, once into German, at least seven times

into Italian. The text was read from Spain to Poland, from Italy to England (Odoric: 50). It spoke of 2000 great cities much bigger than Treviso or Vicenza; “the number of the people is so great that among us here it would be deemed incredible”. The city of Guangzhou (Canton?) was thrice the size of Venice. In another city he reported a monastery holding 3000 monks (120-123).

It is clear that the popes and councils referred to above (sec. 2.2) would have been keenly aware of the vast numbers of people they were condemning to hell by their teaching.

4.3 Psychological conditioning

According to this argument, the limited psychological horizon of the magisterium would have led them to believe that those who had heard and not accepted the gospel message must be guilty of sinning against so obvious a truth (Sullivan: 201). On the contrary, the close contact described above would have convinced them that the others sincerely believed in the faith they professed. If they were not sincere in believing what they did, how explain the fact that many of them (Jews and Muslims) were ready to die for their faith and did in fact do so ? This was quite plain for all Christians to see.

5. Conclusion

It is for the readers to come to their own conclusion, depending on their evaluation of the data and arguments (pro and con) exposed in this essay. No doubt, there can be other teachings which could be examined as I have done with the axiom here.

St Pius College
Goregaon East
Mumbai 400 063

Book Reviews

PATHIL Kuncheria, PAIKADA Mathew (eds.), *Indian Theology Seeking New Horizons*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2007, pp. 320, Price: Rs. 180/-.

Towards the latter half of the XX century there was much ado in certain circles concerning the so-called: *Mutational Man* - a mythical person who was said to symbolize in himself the ideals and aspirations of the contemporary era. It would not be an overstatement to assert that this appellation, with a certain amount of justification, warrants being applied to the inspirational figure of Fr. Joseph Constantine Manalel, who can be considered one of the trailblazers of contemporary Indian theology. The Indian theological fraternity has indeed paid a fitting tribute to this visionary by dedicating to him a *Festschrift* on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday. Interestingly, all the contributors to this commemorative volume are people who have collaborated with Fr. Manalel at different levels. In the first place, there are his confreres belonging to the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate; then there are those who have been associated with him in the ongoing nurturing of his brainchild - the periodical *Jeevadhara*; and finally, those connected with the Indian Theological Association, founded by him – many of whom are erstwhile office-bearers of the self-same association.

The volume is divided into five loosely-knit parts preceded by an *Introduction* and a *Profile of Fr. Constantine Manalel*. The articles are scholarly in nature; the choice of the topics, generally speaking, seems to have been dictated by the specific competence of the author concerned, situated within the parameters set by the coordinators of this *Festschrift*. From a stylistic point of view, the book is, generally speaking, reader-friendly and the printing adequate.

The first part entitled: **Joseph Constantine Manalel – Vision and Mission**, comprises three articles viz., *Joseph Constantine Manalel: His Contributions towards the Development of Indian Theology*, by K.T. Sebastian; *Joseph Constantine Manalel: His Vision and Mission*, by Sunny Maniyakupara; and the third entitled: *Looking Back and Forward*, by Fr. Manalel himself. The first two articles present and situate the person, the vision and the achievements of Fr. Manalel. In the third article, Fr. Manalel himself muses with simplicity and a sense of gratitude on what has taken place in the course of his life. He looks ahead with a sense of hope and a spirit of adventure. The sentiments expressed by this pioneer of Contemporary Indian Theology resonate with the well-known prayer of Dag Hammarskjöld: “For all that is past, ‘Thanks’; for all that is to come, ‘Yes!’”.

However, this vision of Fr. Manalel did not remain an empty dream, but was progressively articulated. The subsequent four parts of this *Festschrift* highlight different dimensions of this realization.

The second part entitled: **Theologizing in Context**, comprises a set of six articles, viz., *Theologizing in Context*, by Kuncheria Pathil cmi; *Doing Peoples’ Theology*, by Errol D’Lima sj; “*A Scribe trained for the Kingdom of God*”: *The Challenging Role of the Theologian*, by Joseph Pathrapankal cmi; “*Word*”: *The Source and Medium of Inter-Culturation*”, by Augustine Mulloor ocd; *The Kairos of the Laity: Some Theologico-Historical Reflections*”, by Dominic Veliath sdb; *Towards a Participatory Church: Triple Functions of the Laity*, by S. Arulsamy. All the above articles deal with different dimensions of theologizing in the context from the perspective of two underpinning motifs, viz. “communion” and “communication”.

Part III, entitled: **Theologizing in Dialogue with Religions and Cultures**, has as its focus, some of the key aspects which characterize the Indian reality, and as a consequence, the theological enterprise itself, viz. the twin realities of the multi-religious context and inculturation in their implications. This section comprises six articles: *The Theological Challenge of the XXI Century: The Harmony*

among Religions, by Raimon Panikkar; *Diversity of Religions, Harmony in Spirituality: A Search with Fides et Ratio of John Paul II*, by Sebastian Painadath sj; *Listening with Respect: Key to Dialogue*, by John Peter Muringathery cmi; *Transforming Cultures*, by Michael Amaladoss sj; *Appropriation of Faith in a Religiously Pluralistic Context: Two Case Studies*, by Felix Wilfred; *An Indian Insight into the Mystery of Christ: Enlarging the Vision of Christ*, by Jacob Parappally msfs. The treatment in the different articles obviously tends to be disparate, with each author bringing his own expertise to bear on what are undoubtedly among the most challenging issues in the Indian theological scenario.

Part IV: **Theologizing in Dialogue with Human Sciences** treats of what is a relatively new emphasis in Catholic theological awareness, viz. the “horizontal collaboration”, the “partnership” that theology must needs have with the human sciences. This sector contains four articles: *Theology in Conversation with the Social Sciences: Exploring New Horizons*, by P.T. Mathew sj; *Economy, Society and Theology*, by George Karakunnel; *Knowledge Economy: An Option for India?* by Mathew Illathuparampil; and the final article (which, arguably, should have found its place more appropriately under the next section): *Faith Seeking Understanding of Praxis: The Evolution of Moral Theology*, by Thomas Srampickal

Under the final section, Part V: **Theologizing for Integral Liberation**, are subsumed four articles, all of which, have as their focus, the dimension of praxis nuanced in various ways, as the titles themselves indicate: *Act Justly, Love Tenderly and Walk Humbly before Your God*, by Samuel Rayan sj; *Liturgy for the Creation of a New Earth and New Heaven*, by Paul Puthanangady sdb; *Memory of Suffering: A Theological Investigation from the Subaltern Perspective*, by Mathew Paikada ofm cap; and *Spirituality for the Widening Ranges of the Mission in India*, by T.K. John sj.

The rich mosaic of articles in this *Festschrift* deal with core-issues of content, context and history with competence and creativity. Together they highlight the depths, the challenges and potentialities faced by one living the Indian Christian experience. As the expression

of both a creed and a quest, some of the avant-garde articles, at times, seem to venture along what may seem an as yet uncharted course. Significantly enough, it may not be unwarranted to assert that this *Festschrift*, in its content, is symbolic of the life-journey traversed by the person to whom this volume is dedicated – Fr. Joseph Constantine Manalel.

Dominic Veliath

Benedict Vadakkekara, *Origin of Christianity in India: A Historiographical Critique* Published by Media House, 375 - A, Pocket- 2, Mayur Vihar Phase 1, Delhi 110 091, Page: 392, Price: Rs. 395.

The book before me for review is another work of Dr. Benedict Vadakkekara, a renowned historian, noted for his scholarship and research on the history St. Thomas Christians of southern India.

His latest work is titled “Origin of Christianity in India: A Historiographical Critique.” The three-chapter book is a systematic presentation that aims a re-look at the origin of Christianity in India. It effectively argues that the living tradition of a community should not be rejected as mere figment of imagination just because the community is unable to produce documented proof to establish its tradition.

The first chapter is a general introduction to the early Christian community in India, explaining its identity and the sources available for the study of its origin.

The book does not aim to prove or disprove the revered tradition of the Indian Christians, who are commonly known to trace the origin of their faith back to St. Thomas, the Apostle. It presents the diametrically opposite interpretations of scholars and historians on the tradition of these Christians of India. Interpreting the same tradition,

one group accepts it as true, while the other dismisses it as a mere legend. The whole of the second chapter is dedicated to identifying and categorizing these diverse interpretations of the tradition.

With matchless skill and exceptional patience, the author has collected and categorized all the schools interpretations of the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians, concentrated mainly on the Kerala coast. Although a Keralite and member of St. Thomas community, the author dispassionately presents the arguments that refuse to accept the tradition as true and valid.

His scholarship and objective mind for truth is best shown in the final chapter where he evaluates the two opposite groups of interpretations of the tradition. He argues for a new methodology for studying history that would give the legitimate place to the living tradition of the community. The new model would demand a re-write of the early history Christianity in India.

The book puts things in a new perspective, when it underscores the need of re-writing the history of peoples and communities, where for generations tradition served the need of history. Tradition can be an integral part of history, or it may even be history itself, he asserts, while asking for a second look at the way we learned history.

The work is no conventional history book because it does not try to present events or developments of community or land in a chronological order. It does not passionately clamour for establishing anything just because a tradition considers it sacred.

The book exhibits the sharpness of a matured mind that wishes to re-write history. Dr. Vadakkekara has once more proved that logic and objectivity are essential tools in studying history.

New Delhi

Christopher Joseph

Addresses of Some of the Centres / Persons Promoting Inter-religious Dialogue in India

North

CBCI Commission for Dialogue
Fr. Dr. M.D. Thomas
National Secretary
CBCI Centre, 1, Ashok Place
New Delhi-110 001

Vidyajyoti
Fr. T. K. John SJ
23, Raj Niwas Marg
Delhi - 110 054

Jesuit Secretariat for Dialogue,
Fr. Victor Edwin SJ
St. Xavier's High School.
Rajnivas Marg,
Delhi 110054

Maitri Sadan
Fr Ganava, SVD
11, Kishan Pole Road
Udaipur- 313 001, Rajasthan

Jigyasu Kendra
Fr Dayanand Kamath
Sadhna Sadan
1, Tashkent Marg
Allahabad - 211 001, U. P.

Maitri Bhavan
Fr. M. Santiago
B-25/1, Bhelupura
Hanumanpura
Varanasi - 221 005, U. P.

Harmony- Inter-faith Forum,
Fr. Thomas Chillikulam SJ
Regional Theology Centre,
Danapur Cantt.
Patna 801503, Bihar

Sadharmyam
Research and Dialogue Centre
Fr Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, CMI
Bhaktiyana, Srinagar
Uttaranchal - 246 174

Masih Vidya Bhavan
Fr. Prasad, SVD
98 Municipal Office Road
Indore - 452 007, M. P.

Snehalaya,
Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue
and Spirituality
Fr. Clarence Srampical SVD
P. B. No.19, Kasturbagram
Indore - 452 020, M. P.

Pradeepti
Fr. George Bhuriya SVD
Padam Nagar
Indore-Khandwa Road
Khandwa - 450 001, M.P

West

Gyan Ashram Center for Dialogue
Music and Dance
Fr. S. M. Michael SVD
Mahakali Road, Andheri (E)
Mumbai - 400 093

Ishvani Kendra
Fr. Stanislaus
Matchwell Factory Road
P. B. No. 3003
Pune - 411 014,

Snehsadan
Fr Drago Caridade SJ
250, Shaniwar Peth
Pune - 411 030

East
Dialogue Centre,
Fr Tejkumar Lugun
Catholic Church
Puri - 752 001, Orissa

South
Ashirvad
Fr Ronnie Prabhu SJ
30, St. Mark's Road Cross
Bangalore - 560 001

Center for Study of World Religions.
Fr. Mathew Chandrakunnel CMI
Dharmaram College
Bangalore - 560 029

Dr. A. Pushparajan
Ananda Reddy Layout
Opposite Adarsha Packing Company
Electronic City, Phase II
Bangalore - 560 100

Fr Jose Kuttanimattathil, SDB
Provincial
Don Bosco, 75, North Road
Bangalore-560 084

Institute of Dialogue with Cultures
and Religions
Fr. Michael Amaldoss SJ.
Loyola College
Chennai - 600 034

Divyodaya, Inter-religious Centre
Fr. Thomas Cheeran CMI
63, Geetha Hall Road
Coimbatore - 641 018

Neighbourhood Community
Network
Fr. M. J. Edwin
8, Kesari Street
Nagercoil - 629 001
Fr Jeyaraj, SJ

Thozhamai Illam (Maitri Bhavan)
Fr. M. Jayaraj SJ
Kovalam Road
Kanyakumari - 629 702

Anmodaya Ashram
Fr. Samarkone, OMI
Enathur P.O
Kanchipuram-631 561, T.N.

Arucholai Inter Reg. Centre
Fr George Ambooken, CMI
Suramangalam P.O.
Salem - 636 005, T.N.

John Paul Dialogue Centre
Fr. A. Suresh
49, Bharathiar Salai
Trichy - 620 001, T.N.

Deepaham Study Centre
Fr. Thomas Thottumkal CMI
Meenakshi Nagar
Thattanneri P.O.
Maduarai- 625 018, T.N.

Arrupe Illam,
Fr. Vincent Sekhar SJ
Arul Anandar College,
Karmathur, 625514, TN.

Ishalaya
Sr. Mary John Kattikatt FMM
Gandhi Nagar,
Palamner, 517408 AP

Assisi Shanti Kendra
Fr Joel Paul OFM Conv.
Karukutti P.O.
Ernakulam Dt. 683576. Kerala

Chavara Cultural Centre
Fr Roby Kannanchira, CMI
Kochi – 682 011, Kerala

Institute of Science and Religion
Fr. Augustine Pamplany, CST
Little Flower Seminary
Alwaye – 683 101. Kerala

Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality
Fr. Sebastian Painadath SJ
Kalady – 683 574
Ernakulam Dt., Kerala

Dharma Bharathi Ashram,
Acharya Catherine Prabhujyoti
Perumpally, 682314,
Ernakulam Dt. Kerala

Chavara Cultural Centre
Fr Job Myladyil Alavelil, CMI
Amalapuri,
Calicut – 673 001, Kerala

Upasana Cultural Center
Fr. Albert Nambiaparambil CMI
Thodupuzha – 685 584
Idukki Dist., Kerala

Snehavani
Fr. James Naduvilekut
Adichira Junction, Thellakam
P.O.
Kottayam – 686 016, Kerala

Fr. Vincent Kundukulam
St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary
Alwaye, 683 103
Ernakulam Dist., Kerala

Sr. Therese Koottiyanyil
Assumption Sisters
Arunapuram P.O.
Pala – 686 574, Kottayam Dt.,

(The Editor will be grateful if further addresses are communicated to him for publishing a more comprehensive documentation: spainadath@gmail.com)